

U.S. Marines and Irregular Warfare

Training and Education, 2000–2010



U.S. Marines and Irregular Warfare Training and Education 2000–2010



by
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Foreword

From the development of amphibious warfare to the creation of the air-ground task force, the U.S. Marine Corps has a long history of innovation. Marines have also made a significant number of advances in the field of irregular warfare. During the early twentieth century, Marines fought small wars in Central America and the Caribbean and published one of the first detailed treatises on the subject, *The Small Wars Manual*, in 1940.

Over the course of the last decade, the Marine Corps rediscovered its small wars heritage and once again demonstrated its adaptable and innovative character as it fought insurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq. Before the start of those wars, the Marine Corps' principal focus was on conducting contingency operations of limited duration. While most planners believed that the most likely places Marines would conduct these operations were in the volatile and populated areas of Africa, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia, there was little attention paid to learning about the cultures and societies of these regions. Both the Iraq War and Afghanistan War forced Marines to conduct counterinsurgency operations in densely populated areas where knowledge of the local social geography was as critical to achieving success as defeating insurgent forces in open battle. Marines quickly adapted both in the field and at the Corps' training installations and schools. This book recounts the remarkable story of how the Marine Corps instituted new programs and new courses of study to train and educate Marines in counterinsurgency and irregular warfare.

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Dr. Charles P. Neimeyer
Director of Marine Corps History

Preface

This book recounts a period of considerable intellectual activity and change within the Marine Corps. The initial fighting during the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars convinced many Marine leaders that it needed to strengthen and enhance how it trained and educated Marines in counterinsurgency operations. The changes initiated by such Marines as General James N. Mattis, General James F. Amos, Colonel John A. Toolan Jr., and many others include transforming the Combined-Arms Exercise into Exercise Mojave Viper, revising the Marine Corps University Command and Staff College's curriculum to better address cultural anthropology and foreign languages, and to create new organizations, such as the Center for Irregular Warfare and the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning.

However, it is important to note that many of these changes were initiated from the ground up, as Marines in Iraq and Afghanistan improvised counterinsurgency tactics in the field. They lived and operated in heavily populated areas and quickly learned that forging close relations with Iraqis and Afghans could lay the foundations for valuable and fruitful intelligence networks and ultimately isolate foreign fighters from organizations such as al-Qaeda. This book recounts these dual tracks of innovation, examining how Marines adapted in the field and at home at Quantico, Virginia, and Twentynine Palms, California.

This volume would not have been possible without the contributions of numerous individuals at the Marine Corps History Division, including chief historian Charles D. Melson, senior editor Angela J. Anderson, senior reference historian Annette D. Amerman, historian Paul D. Westermeyer, editors Wanda J. Renfrow and Andrea L. Connell, and designer Vincent J. Martinez. I am also thankful to Zayna N. Bizri, a History Division intern who worked as my research assistant in 2012 and 2013. I would also like to recognize Donald F. Bittner, professor at the Marine Corps University, whose discussions with me about the history of the Command and Staff College were extremely helpful.

Dr. Nicholas J. Schlosser
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Introduction

This is a brief history of how the Marine Corps trained and adapted to fight the Global War on Terrorism. It is not intended to be a comprehensive, definitive account, but instead aims to provide readers with a broad survey of the changes and innovations developed by the Marines to conduct counterinsurgency warfare in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Between 2001 and 2011, the U.S. military devised a number of measures to strengthen its ability to fight insurgencies in both those countries. In the Marine Corps, the changes occurred along two parallel courses. First, individual Marine Corps units in the field devised techniques to address the specific security problems and challenges in their particular areas of responsibility. Second, the constituent commands and units of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC) formulated new approaches to warfighting, revised the curriculum at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College, and wrote doctrine to strengthen Marine Corps training and proficiency in counterinsurgency (or irregular warfare). Often, MCCDC's initiatives stemmed from lessons learned by Marine Corps units following their deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Over the past decade, especially following the outbreak of the insurgency against the American occupation of Iraq in 2003, there has been renewed interest both in the military and among scholars on the subject of counterinsurgency. Furthermore, much of this work has contributed to a general examination of how the U.S. military adapted and transformed itself, and has even described the transformation as “epic” and revolutionary in nature.¹ These works have largely focused on the United States Army, the largest of the U.S. Armed Services and, in terms of numbers of its personnel deployed over the past 10 years, the Service that has borne the brunt of



Photo by Cpl Matthew S. Richards
A Marine from Battalion Landing Team 1/4 on patrol in the Iraqi city of an-Najaf in 2004. The deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan prompted a renewed interest in irregular warfare throughout the Marine Corps during the 2000s.

fighting the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. As the largest Service, the Army's adaptation to fighting counterinsurgency has also required more striking change to its overall culture as an institution, with individual branches going through often dramatic reassessments of their primary functions and purpose as warfighters. Thus, it is unsurprising that most recent studies have focused primarily on the Army's changes and adaptations.²

Many works written over the past decade on how the military adapted to fight counterinsurgency have utilized the Marine Corps as a means of comparison to draw conclusions about the Army.³ However, little work has been done on how the Corps adapted in its own right. Its ap-

proach to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, nevertheless, forms an important part of the broader story of the military's transformation, especially in light of its significant contributions to both of those conflicts. While in terms of numbers, more soldiers than Marines have served in both wars, the Corps' involvement has been significant and often decisive, especially in proportion to its size. Despite being the smallest of the United States' Armed Services, the Marine Corps deployed most of its personnel to fight both wars. Throughout the Iraq insurgency, one forward-deployed Marine expeditionary force operated in that country each year from 2004 to 2010. Sea-based Marine expeditionary units also served as United States Central Command's operational reserve.⁴ The Corps' area of responsibility, al-Anbar Province, was the largest of Iraq's provinces and also the stronghold of the Sunni insurgency. Furthermore, the tactics devised by Coalition forces to defeat the insurgency in that region, which focused on forging alliances with tribal federations and militias against the insurgent forces, played an important part in ending the insurgency in the province. The approach also influenced the overarching U.S. strategy in the country during the "surge" period beginning in 2007. Thus, an analysis of the Marine Corps' contribution to the counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan is an important step toward gaining a full understanding of what the U.S. military as a whole did to fight those two conflicts.

The study is framed around a number of questions. First, what role did the Marine Corps' past fighting small wars in Central America and Asia play in how it battled the two insurgencies? Second, what was the source of these adaptations? Was it propelled from below, or instituted from above? Was interservice rivalry a catalyst for innovation and change? Finally, did these adaptations lead to a fundamental transformation of the Marine Corps as a whole and its principal missions in particular?

Marine Corps Organizational and Institutional Culture

Militaries, especially those raised and trained to defend a democratic state, change due to a confluence of political and cultural factors.⁵ Culture is particularly pertinent to understanding how the Marine Corps changed and adapted to the Global War on Terrorism. The internal organizational and institutional culture of the Corps has been as significant an influence on shaping the Service as external factors have been.⁶ In particular, the search for a mission has been a leitmotif throughout the Marine Corps' history since its creation during the American War of Independence. The Corps has performed a wide range of missions throughout its existence, including serving as naval security forces, participating in landing parties, providing the military contributions to U.S. diplomatic interventions, and serving as the United States' principal amphibious assault force.⁷ Thus, the nation's amphibious force-in-readiness has never had a clearly defined geographic area of responsibility. The Army fights on land, the Navy fights at sea, and the Air Force fights in the air. The Marine Corps fights in all three domains. This has helped make it into a highly versatile and adaptable military force capable of performing a wide variety of missions.

While this capability testifies to the Marine Corps' versatility and adaptability, it has also been a source of vulnerability for the Service. On several occasions throughout its history, elements within the executive branch have attempted to either weaken or outright dissolve the Marine Corps as an independent Service. Detractors frequently noted that the Marine Corps duplicated many of the Army's ground fighting duties and was thus redundant. The most serious of these efforts took place during the dramatic drawdown of American military forces following World War II, when supporters of defense unification sought to reduce the Fleet Marine Force from a multidivision, multiwing combat force into a small num-

ber of regimental-size units attached to the Navy. The shock of the Korean War halted the draw-down of America's postwar military strength. The performance of the Marine Corps during that conflict also attested to the Service's skill on the battlefield and effectiveness as a combat force. Ultimately, congressional support preserved the Marine Corps as an independent Service within the Department of the Navy. By 1952, Congress also guaranteed Marine Corps representation on the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁸

Despite successful efforts to preserve its existence, the Marine Corps remains an institution perennially on guard. This state of affairs has led to what scholar Terry Terriff has described as an "organizational paranoia." Constantly fearful for its existence as an independent military Service, several notable Marine Corps leaders pressed the Service to innovate and adapt to potentially new missions.⁹ Lieutenant Colonel Earl H. Ellis, Lieutenant General John A. Lejeune, Major General John H. Russell, Major General Merritt A. Edson, and Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak stand as just a small number of officers who examined new potential missions and spurred the Marine Corps to innovate and adapt to new roles, whether it was amphibious warfare, small wars, or counterinsurgency.¹⁰ The Marine Corps has constantly been on the lookout for missions and specialties to which it can adapt itself in order to protect and strengthen its status among the other Armed Services.

As a result, no single mission has dominated the institution and overwhelmed planning for other potential missions. As Marines prepared doctrine for amphibious landings and the defense of forward bases during the 1930s, they also prepared manuals for small wars.¹¹ During the 1960s, the Marines continued to focus on amphibious operations while also preparing to fight guerrillas and insurgencies.¹² During the 1980s, when maneuver warfare became the overriding doctrine for Marine planners, there was also interest in low-intensity conflict.



Official Department of Defense photo
BGen Randolph C. Berkeley and his staff at Quantico in 1931. Generals like Berkeley helped transform Quantico into the intellectual center of the Marine Corps during the 1920s and 1930s. The installation continues to fill this role.

However, while the Marine Corps has planned for a variety of missions throughout its history, its leaders tended to emphasize certain missions over others. During the 1930s, the Corps' leadership was much more concerned with building an amphibious assault force than it was in preparing Marines for small wars and colonial interventions.¹³ Similarly, while the Marines devised a number of innovative counterinsurgency programs during the Vietnam War, such as the Combined Action Program, the Service was eager to put guerrilla warfare behind it once the last Marines withdrew from Southeast Asia in the 1970s. Renewing focus on amphibious warfare, Marine Corps planners shifted attention to planning for a large-scale conventional war against the Soviet Union and China.¹⁴ Although many argued at the time that Marines were more likely going to be fighting insurgencies in the Third

World than the Soviet Army in Europe, on the whole, the Marine Corps focused on conventional warfare. The 1989 *Warfighting, Fleet Marine Force Manual 1*, which codified the principles of maneuver, mechanization, and speed, was the culminating point of nearly two decades of development within the Marine Corps as it trained to fight in a war with the Soviet Union.¹⁵

Although interest in certain types of warfare, such as counterinsurgency and small wars, has waxed and waned throughout its history, the U.S. Marine Corps has never forgotten its heritage fighting these types of campaigns nor neglected the possibility that it could very likely fight these types of wars in the future.¹⁶

Terminology: Small Wars, Irregular Warfare, and Counterinsurgency

Since the Iraq insurgency erupted in 2003, terms such as “small wars,” “irregular warfare,” “guerrilla warfare,” and “counterinsurgency” have been used somewhat interchangeably. Since these terms often carry specific meanings anchored to their historical context, it is important to assess their relative utility to describe the types of conflicts the Marine Corps fought in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The concept of an irregular, or partisan, component to warfare is not a new one. Carl von Clausewitz’s *Vom Kriege* devotes a chapter to the subject of “peoples’” or “popular” war (*Volkskrieg*).¹⁷ For Clausewitz, such warfare was a component of conventional war, with irregular fighters serving in a supporting role to the larger war. Thus, partisan warfare was not a distinct form of conflict unto itself. By the late nineteenth century, however, military thinkers began to cast a distinction between wars fought to subdue colonial populations in Europe’s overseas empires and wars fought between the major European nation-states.¹⁸ The British soldier C. E. Callwell, in one of the first comprehensive overviews of the subject, used the term small wars to describe these types of colonial conflicts, defining them simply as “operations of regular armies against irregular, or comparatively

speaking irregular forces.”¹⁹ The term gained common currency throughout the early twentieth century, and was used by the Marine Corps to describe its interventions in Central America and China. The experiences from these conflicts (known as the “Banana Wars,” during which Marines battled bandits and other fighters) were codified in the 1930s in the *Small Wars Manual*, the first American doctrinal publication on the subject of irregular warfare.²⁰ The Marine Corps’ definition of small wars was much more specific than Callwell’s, describing them as military and diplomatic operations conducted with the objective of altering the external and internal dynamics of an unstable state in order to create a situation amenable to the United States.²¹ Thus, small wars were a specific type of warfare defined by a unique combination of military and diplomatic characteristics.

By the 1960s, the term small wars had largely fallen out of use and had been replaced by the concepts of insurgency and counterinsurgency. In its broadest sense, insurgency has generally referred to any kind of organized effort to use armed force or subversion to cause a change in government. Counterinsurgency has been used to reference the military, political, and diplomatic efforts used to combat insurgencies.²² However, the terms gained popularity and importance during the 1960s due to their association with the Cold War and the Maoist wars of national liberation. In particular, the terms were used to describe the Communist-led uprisings (and the struggles to defeat them) in Indochina. The John F. Kennedy administration’s prevailing concern with Soviet-led efforts to spread Communism into the Third World through wars of liberation forced military leaders to address the concept of counterinsurgency, and a number of military journals devoted entire issues to the subject. As with the concept of small wars, many military thinkers considered counterinsurgency to be a unique and specific type of war requiring different sets of skills, tactics, and strategies. The American experience in Vietnam forced

a reappraisal of counterinsurgency as a military theory, and by the 1970s the term had largely fallen out of use.²³

During the two decades before the Global War on Terrorism, two new terms emerged to describe irregular warfare. Both continued the bifurcation of warfare into regular and irregular types. The first, prevalent during the 1980s, was “low-intensity conflict,” and was used by the Ronald W. Reagan administration to characterize the numerous Marxist insurgencies then waging throughout the Third World. The second, “military operations other than war,” (MOOTW) gained prominence during the 1990s as a way of describing the wide range of contingency operations short of the conventional combat that the military was expected to conduct.²⁴ These included not only antiguerrilla warfare, but also humanitarian operations and advisory missions.

Thus, the concept of irregular warfare is an old one and a wide variety of terms have emerged over the course of history to describe it. These terms can be problematic. Implying a bifurcation in warfare exists has often led to the assumption that “irregular warfare” is radically different from “regular warfare.”²⁵ Consequently, thinkers have qualified both as being more or less difficult to fight than the other. Terms such as military operations other than war and low-intensity conflict contradict the very intense, violent, and difficult nature of operations conducted to carry out counterinsurgencies and antiguerrilla wars. At the same time, analysts and military leaders have gone the other way in characterizing unconventional war as such a complex and difficult form of warfare that only a specific type of soldier is capable of even fighting it.²⁶

Such a division is largely artificial however. Whether they are irregular wars or regular wars, both types require an understanding of strategy, the operational art, and tactics on the part of civilians and soldiers. Both also require soldiers to comprehend the intersection between politics and military action. In short, both conventional

and unconventional warfare entail the use of violence by rivals to force one to bend to the other’s will. The distinction between the two lies in the nature of the combatants.

Consequently, this study uses the terms irregular, unconventional, and small to describe any war in which at least one of the combatant forces is not part of an organized military force attached to a nation-state or a coalition of nation-states. These forces can be guerrillas, insurgents, terrorists, or even criminal organizations, and their goal does not necessarily have to be overthrowing a government. Therefore, this volume treats insurgency as a specific type of irregular war in which the unorganized combatant force aims to change or depose an organized government utilizing military, political, and subversive tactics.



Official Department of Defense photo
The Marine Corps has a long history of innovation and adaptation, clearly demonstrated in its development of amphibious landing and assault tactics and techniques during the 1920s and 1930s. Here, U.S. Marines conduct an amphibious landing exercise sometime during the pre-World War II years.

Furthermore, it defines the term small wars in a much broader manner than the Marine Corps' *Small Wars Manual* does.

Methodology and Sources

Following the introduction, the study surveys the history of Marine Corps operations in small wars until the 11 September 2001 attacks, focusing on the breaks and continuities in how the Marine Corps has approached irregular warfare. The next four chapters explore in detail how the Marine Corps ultimately adapted to fighting the insurgency in Iraq. As will be seen, the Global War on Terrorism did not immediately spark a counterinsurgency renaissance within the Marine Corps. Between 2001 and 2003, the prevailing assumption was that the conflict would continue to be waged by small, networked units capable of drawing on significant firepower to overwhelm enemy forces. As chapter 3 shows, the Iraq War forced a rapid change in this viewpoint and led Marine Corps units in the field to both develop new means and resurrect old approaches to defeat the insurgency that quickly erupted in Iraq in 2003. Chapters 4 and 5 explore how the experiences of Marines in the field were adapted to Marine Corps training and ultimately created a rigorous and focused training program in coun-

terinsurgency that nevertheless continued to ensure Marine Corps units remained versatile and adaptable to a multitude of missions and contingencies.

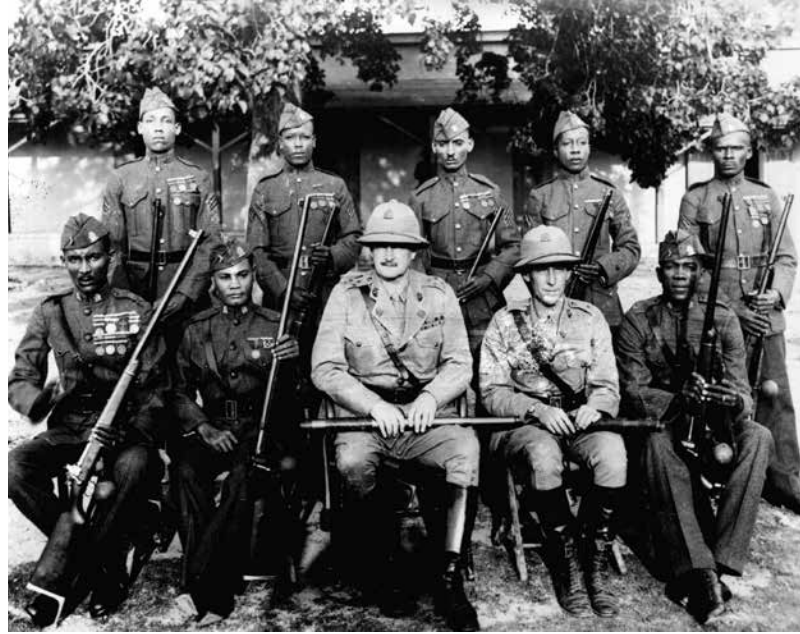
The principal sources for this study are the command chronologies of Marine Corps units currently stored at the Marine Corps Archives in Quantico, Virginia. These range from monthly to annual summaries of unit activities. The chronologies analyzed for this study include those of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command, the Training and Education Command, and the Education Command, as well as chronologies from combat units deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. The study also draws on substantial archival material from the Training and Education Command, which includes briefings and reports from the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory and other education commands. Another important source is the files of the Command and Staff College, which include course outlines and syllabi. Finally, this study draws on a number of interviews with Marines. Some of these were conducted by the author, though most were conducted by the Marine Corps History Division's Field History Branch, often in the field, and the transcripts are currently housed at the Marine Corps History Division Oral History Collection in Quantico, Virginia.

Chapter 1

A Heritage of Fighting Small Wars: The Marine Corps and Irregular Warfare, 1900–1990

Marines have fought in irregular wars since the Corps' earliest days. Throughout the nineteenth century, as the Navy's principal landing force, Marines participated in irregular conflicts throughout the world, including expeditions against the Barbary pirates in 1804, landings conducted to disrupt the slave trade in Africa in 1843, and landings in Korea in 1871.¹ The Marine Corps also fought alongside the Army in several Indian Wars, notably those against the Seminoles and Creeks during the 1830s.² However, it would be during the early twentieth century that small wars became an element of the Marine Corps that distinguished it from the missions of the other Services.

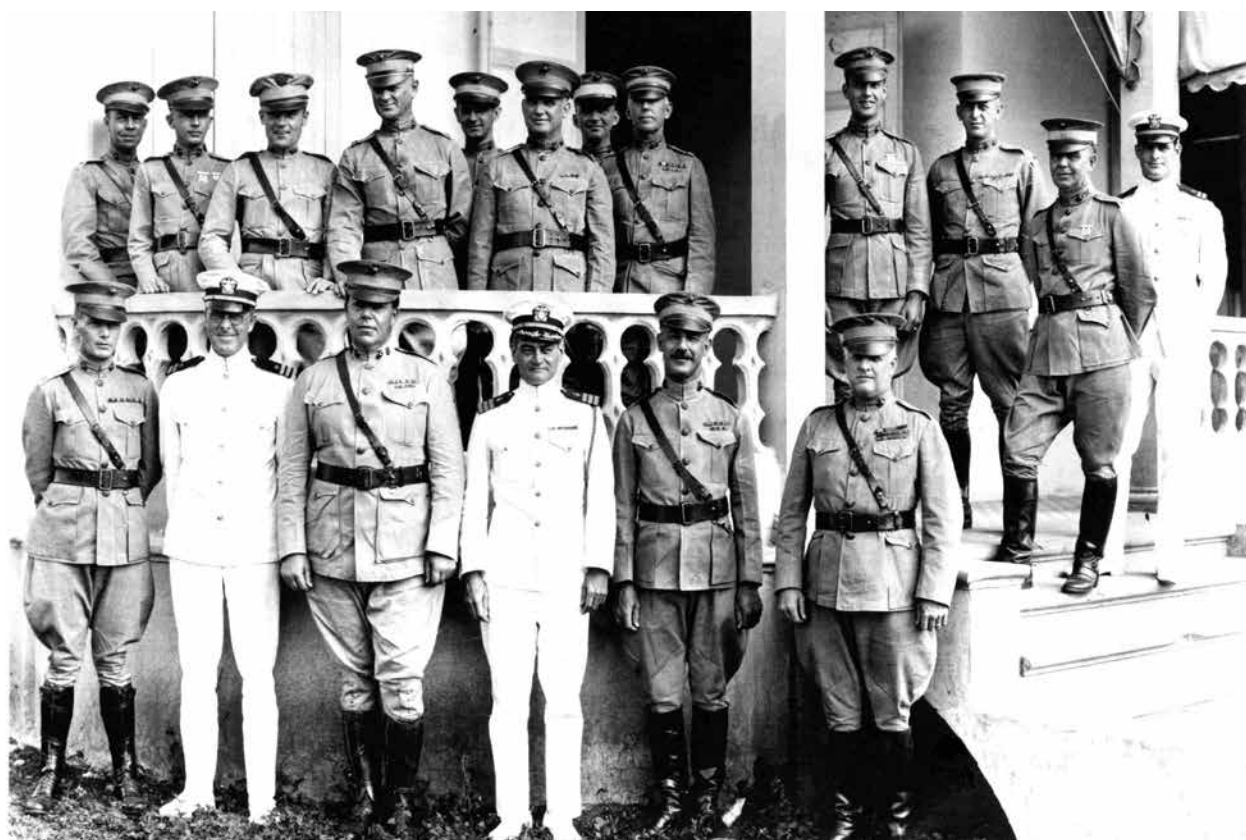
The Marines were not the only American Armed Service to fight irregular wars during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as the Army's experiences during the Indian Wars and Philippine War demonstrate.³ However, whereas the Army's participation in these conflicts emanated from its role as the primary Service responsible for continental and national defense (the Philippines being a formal U.S. colony following the Spanish-American War), what came to be known as the Banana Wars in Central America and the Caribbean were the results of State Department efforts to protect American political and economic interests in independent states. As a landing force stationed onboard naval vessels, the Marines had long participated in brief actions to protect American citizens abroad. However, during the first decades of the twentieth century, Marine Corps' landings took on the character of long-term interventions aimed at altering the foreign and domestic policies of for-



Official Department of Defense photo
Training and equipping native constabularies was a common practice of the U.S. interventions into such countries as Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua. This image from the early 1900s depicts riflemen of the Haitian Gendarmerie and their Marine officers.

eign states and even transforming local governing and security institutions.⁴

Experiences in Central America and the Caribbean would prove to be the most significant for the Marine Corps' doctrine and institutional identity. Three of the most important were interventions in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua. The interventions and subsequent occupations saw the Marine Corps become a major political and military presence in all three countries throughout the first decades of the twentieth century.⁵ In all three, the Marines were deployed at the behest of the State Department to end civil



Official Department of Defense photo

The level of involvement in local civil affairs varied widely from country to country during the interventions in the Caribbean. In some cases, such as the Dominican Republic, Marines and sailors led the government and filled their ministerial posts. This image depicts Gen Harry Lee (front row, far right) and his executive and military staffs in Santo Domingo.

strife, strengthen pro-American governments, and aid those governments against rebel forces. In all three, the Marine Corps established local constabularies officered and trained by Marines, such as the *Gardia Nacional* in Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic and the Haitian *Gendarmerie*.⁶ In some cases, notably in the Dominican Republic in 1916, U.S. forces established formal occupation authority over the country and ruled by decree, filling the cabinet portfolios with Marine and Navy personnel. More commonly though, the Marine Corps operated in support of the local governments, monitored elections, trained local forces, and constructed public works. The Marines also participated in a range of counter guerrilla operations against rebel groups opposed to the local government and the

United States presence there, such as the *cacos* in Haiti, Augusto Sandino's bandit forces in Nicaragua, and insurgents in the eastern provinces of the Dominican Republic. In all of the interventions, reported incidents of brutality and atrocities damaged the Marine Corps' image in the eyes of both the American public and the populations of the countries in which they were serving.⁷

Marines were ready to put the experience of the Central American small wars behind them when the occupations came to an end in 1934. Duty in the Caribbean and Nicaragua was marked by boredom, disease, a hostile populace, and problems with discipline and unit cohesion. Major General Smedley D. Butler, who received one of his two Medals of Honor battling *cacos* in Haiti in 1915, denounced the operations, and declared

that he had been nothing more than “a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street, and for the bankers.”⁸ Many Marines were also concerned that continued involvement in such conflicts threatened to marginalize the Corps as a Service. Thus, during the 1930s, many Marines began to devote their full attention to the creation of a Fleet Marine Force and the twin missions of amphibious assault and advance base defense.

Nevertheless, the small wars experience would have a number of short- and long-term consequences for the Marine Corps. In the short term, an entire generation of Marines had gained combat experience fighting with small units in jungle terrain. Many of these Marines, such as Alexander A. Vandegrift, Merritt A. Edson, and Lewis B. Puller, would go on to serve with distinction in the jungles of the Pacific Islands during World War II, drawing on their experiences fighting against the *cacos* and Sandinistas as they battled the Japanese. Of long-term significance to the Marine Corps was the wealth of experience and knowledge acquired about the strategies and tactics for fighting small wars. The involvement in the political and institutional development of foreign states set the Central American interventions apart from previous Marine Corps operations. Importantly, the interventions and Central American small wars exposed the Marines to a new type of warfare in which political considerations often took precedence over defeating enemy forces in the field. In short, the Banana Wars made irregular warfare a part of the Marine Corps’ institutional identity.

The Marine Corps had gone into the conflicts without any doctrinal guidance, and many of the tactics it employed were developed in the field as Marines experimented with different techniques. Marines such as Major Samuel M. Harrington and Major Harold H. Utley wrote and published articles on fighting small wars in *Marine Corps Gazette*.⁹ During the 1930s, a number of Marines, including Utley’s subordinate and fellow Nicaragua veteran, then-First Lieutenant Merritt A. Edson, collaborated on collecting these lessons

and producing a manual for future small wars. The *Small Wars Manual*, published in its final form in 1940, synthesized the Marine Corps’ experiences in Central America and collected over three decades of lessons culled from these campaigns. Interestingly, its publication indicated the belief among many that the era of interventions was not yet over.

The *Small Wars Manual* was heavily influenced by Colonel C. E. Callwell’s *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*. A British officer who had served in various small wars throughout the British Empire at the turn of the century, Callwell was among the first to argue that a distinction existed between regular and irregular warfare. Irregular wars, or small wars as Callwell described them, were “operations of regular armies against irregular, or comparatively speaking irregular, forces.”¹⁰ Callwell’s work would go on to influence the conceptualization of small wars in a number of other ways. For example, the work recommended that forces fighting insurrections remain on the offensive, deploy small units, and understand the role cultural attitudes and beliefs played in shaping the nature and character of each particular conflict. Callwell’s influence over the writers of the *Small Wars Manual* was so great that they even borrowed, either consciously or unconsciously, specific passages from the former work. For example, with regard to the need to maintain the offensive, Callwell wrote, “It is most unfortunate when this occurs, because it puts the disciplined army in a thoroughly false position. The enemy gathers courage, many who have held aloof *flock to join hostile standards*, the longer the situation lasts, the more formidable will be the forces which must eventually be overthrown.”¹¹ The *Small Wars Manual* made the same warning, cautioning leaders that “A guerilla leader, if unmolested in his activities, creates the impression among the native population that the intervening forces are inferior to him; *recruits flock to his standard*, and the rapid pacification of the country will be jeopardized.”¹²

While Callwell's work cast a shadow upon the architects of the *Small Wars Manual*, it was also different in a number of significant ways. For example, Callwell spoke of waging a war of annihilation aimed at delivering a critical blow to the enemy that would break its will to resist. "The records of small wars show unmistakably how great is the impression made upon semi-civilized races and upon savages by a bold and resolute procedure."¹³ For Callwell, small wars were wars of annexation, retribution, and suppression aimed at ensuring loyalty to the British crown and empire. For the Marines, the interventions, while imperial in nature, were governed primarily by the need to bring about stability so that U.S. forces could withdraw. Thus, subjugation of the enemy was of less importance than creating a stable political settlement amenable to the Department of State.

The distinction is apparent in the Corps' definition of small wars, which is quite different from how Callwell defined them:

As applied to the United States, 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 whose government is unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory for the preservation of life and of such interests as are determined by the foreign policy of our Nation.¹⁴

Whereas Callwell called for large-scale use of destructive force, the *Small Wars Manual* declared that "campaigns of conquest are contrary to the policy of the Government of the United States."¹⁵ The manual's writers also stressed the predominant role diplomatic and political factors played in the prosecution of campaigns against insurrections, writing that "Small wars situations are usually a phase of, or an operation taking place concurrently with, diplomatic effort. The political authorities do not relinquish active par-



Official Marine Corps History Division photo
Civil activities were a common element of the Central American and Caribbean interventions. In this image from Nicaragua, a Marine places a voter's finger in ink to ensure that the man cannot vote again.

ticipation in the negotiations and they ordinarily continue to exert considerable influence on the military campaign."¹⁶ The overall conception of small wars laid out by the manual's writers was of a limited war dependent on political and diplomatic considerations. As the manual observed,

In [ordinary military duties, officers] simply strive to attain a method of producing the maximum physical effect with the force at their disposal. In small wars, caution must be exercised, and instead of striving to generate maximum power with forces available, the goal is to gain decisive results with the least application of force and the consequent minimum loss of life.¹⁷

Thus, the Marine Corps' definition of small wars focused on the ultimate political and dip-

lomatic goals specific to the conflict itself. The manual not only included chapters on small unit tactics, patrols, and aviation, but also chapters on training local constabularies and organizing elections.

Of particular interest was how the manual depicted the populace of the country in which a small war was taking place. More than 20 years before David Galula argued that the population was the focus of counterinsurgency, the *Small Wars Manual* made a similar argument:

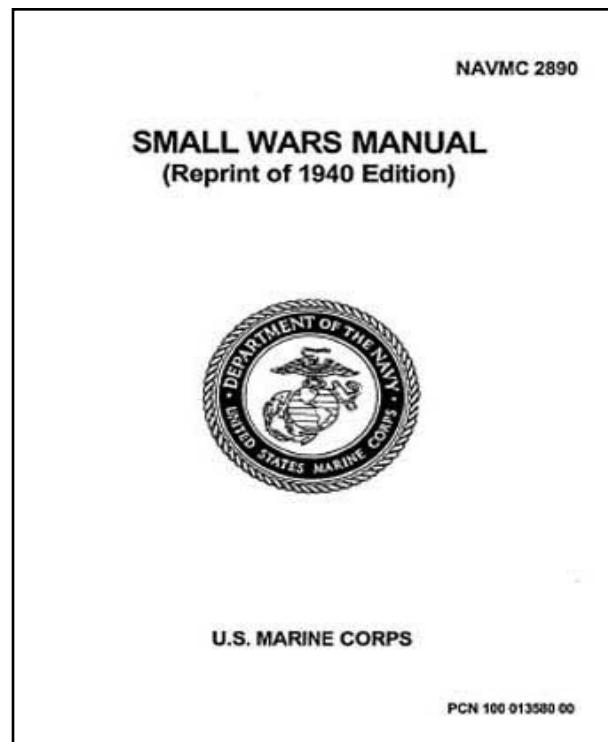
In major warfare, hatred of the enemy is developed among troops to arouse courage. In small wars, tolerance, sympathy, and kindness should be the keynote of our relationship with the mass of the population. There is nothing in this principle which should make any officer or man hesitate to act with the necessary firmness within the limitation imposed by the principles which have been laid down, whenever there is contact with armed opposition.¹⁸

The manual also encouraged close contact between the occupying Marines and the local populace, concluding that “Whether a military commander be stationed at a headquarters in a metropolis or assigned to the smallest outpost, he must necessarily come into contact with the civilian population. By ‘contact’ in this case is implied intercourse in daily life. The transaction of daily routine involves the association with the civilian element, even in the most tranquil territory.”¹⁹ The manual stressed the need to understand local customs, culture, and psychology.

A great deal of the *Small Wars Manual* marks it as a product of the 1930s. Perhaps the most well-known anachronism is its extensive sections on pack mules and animal care. Words such as “The influence of racial psychology on the destiny of a people appears plainly in the history of those subject to perpetual revolutions” are also just

one of a number of instances revealing the racist perspectives of some of the manual’s authors. The manual also assumed that “small wars represent the normal and frequent operations of the Marine Corps,” a postulation based on the fact that Marines had been engaged in some kind of small war almost every year between the Spanish-American War and the writing of the manual in the 1930s.²⁰ The Marine Corps, as the manual’s authors conceived it, was an expeditionary arm of the Department of State and the Department of the Navy. Ironically, the word “amphibious” does not appear once in the entire document, despite the fact that Marines were devising an amphibious landing manual at the same time the *Small Wars Manual* was being written.

Yet, despite these elements and the work’s overall debt to Callwell, the *Small Wars Manual*



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo
The Marine Corps’ Small Wars Manual was printed in its final form in 1940. Its authors assumed the Marine Corps would be involved in small wars and similar contingency operations for much of the foreseeable future.

looked forward in a number of significant ways. Its concept of a limited war in which annihilation of the enemy did not necessarily mean victory and its assertion that winning over the population was a critical means for achieving success (more than a decade before the phrase “winning hearts and minds” came into use) remain critical characteristics of current counterinsurgency doctrines. In sum, the *Small Wars Manual* stands as one of the most significant Marine Corps contributions to the theory and understanding of counterinsurgency warfare.

With the United States’ entry into World War II, the need to transform the Marine Corps into a Fleet Marine Force capable of executing amphibious assaults and seizing strategic islands across the Pacific took on a new importance. Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa soon overshadowed the Banana Wars as testaments to the Corps’ skill, determination, and effectiveness as a military Service. As a result, small wars doctrine was largely overshadowed by the need to develop the tactics and strategy of amphibious warfare over the next two decades.

Counterinsurgency and the Vietnam War

The decade and a half following World War II presented a range of challenges to the Marine Corps. The Harry S. Truman administration’s proposals to unify the Armed Services threatened to render the Marine Corps irrelevant. Even when Congress passed a series of laws that guaranteed the Marine Corps’ size, mission, and right to representation on the Joint Chiefs of Staff between 1947 and 1952, the Corps still faced a number of challenges that placed its existence in question. Statutory protection was pointless if the Corps was unable to make a meaningful contribution to national defense. However, nuclear weapons had thrown the possibility of future amphibious landings into doubt, as a single atomic bomb could wipe out the assembled sea and land forces necessary to stage a large-scale forced entry, the precise type of warfare to which the Marine Corps had

dedicated itself.²¹ The Corps developed a number of innovations to confront the challenge of nuclear warfare, perhaps the most notable being vertical envelopment, in which Marines airlifted behind enemy lines by helicopter would seize inland defenses and prevent the enemy from using nuclear strikes to disrupt subsequent landings from the sea.²²

The Marine Corps was not the only Service struggling to define its role and mission in the face of the Cold War rivalry. Both the Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower administrations had embraced strategic bombers armed with nuclear weapons as the best means of deterring war against the Soviet Union. As a result, both presidents reduced the resources and budgets of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps in favor of the Air Force. This led to two notable incidents in which Navy and Army leaders publicly declared their opposition to the White House. In 1948, “The Revolt of the Admirals” saw the resignation of several Navy commanders in response to the Defense Department’s decision to cut spending for carriers capable of launching nuclear-armed bombers.²³ In 1959, in reaction to President Eisenhower’s “New Look” embracing massive retaliation as the primary means of defense, former Army Chief of Staff General Maxwell D. Taylor published *The Uncertain Trumpet*, a comprehensive critique of Eisenhower’s approach that introduced the concept of flexible response. An ill-defined term that proposed preparing the U.S. military for a wide range of different threats, not just nuclear ones, Taylor’s thesis was embraced by Massachusetts Senator Kennedy, who subsequently made it the foundation for his national security platform during his presidential run in 1960.²⁴

The election of Kennedy to the presidency spurred the emergence of a second major period of discussion and debate about small wars within the Marine Corps. Kennedy believed that the Soviets were directing their attention to wars of national liberation in the so-called Third World. Kennedy

and his advisors saw this as the new battleground of the Cold War.²⁵ Flexible response, with its stipulation that the U.S. military be prepared for a wide variety of threats and contingencies, seemed to present the best means for confronting this new Cold War challenge.

Kennedy believed that the best soldiers to battle Communist guerrillas were special forces.²⁶ Nevertheless, the change in focus to the Third World and guerrilla warfare presented the Corps with the opportunity to reestablish a niche in the national security establishment that would allow it to maintain its expeditionary character without duplicating the Army's role as America's primary ground combat Service. Since the Korean War, a number of incidents had given the Marine Corps the occasion to demonstrate its value as a contingency force-in-readiness. In 1958, battalions from the 2d Marine Division occupied Lebanon in an effort to end civil strife in that nation.²⁷ In 1958, a Marine aircraft wing was sent to reinforce the defense of Taiwan in response to aggressive maneuvers from the Peoples' Republic of China. Thus, the Marines had already established that its historical ability to stand as a force-in-readiness was undiminished.

The Marine Corps' response to Kennedy's interest in counterinsurgency was ambivalent. On the one hand, a number of prominent Marines, such as General Victor H. Krulak, argued that the Marine Corps was ideally suited to counterinsurgency operations. On the other hand, many Marine leaders opposed any changes to the Corps' training and doctrine that would limit its effectiveness as an amphibious assault force. General David M. Shoup, Commandant of the Marine Corps from 1960 to 1963, conveyed this position when he testified before the House Armed Services Committee:

Counterinsurgency is an attention-getting word these days and you may properly ask what the Marine Corps is doing in the field. We do not claim to be experts in the



Official Marine Corps History Division photo
The Kennedy administration sparked a period of considerable interest in counterinsurgency within the military. Kennedy's special assistant for counterinsurgency and special activities, Victor Krulak (photographed here as a lieutenant general), strongly pushed the Marine Corps to pay greater attention to irregular warfare.

entire scope of actions required in counterinsurgency operations.

We do stand ready to carry out the military portions of such operations and to contribute to such other aspects of the counterinsurgency effort as may be appropriate.

The Marine Corps has long recognized that fighting guerrillas is an inherent part of landing force operations.

Counter guerrilla warfare is essentially one of small units and we have traditionally emphasized individual leadership and small unit operations.

I am convinced that the training properly equips our tactical units to combat rabble, insurgents, guerrillas or an enemy equipped with modern conventional or nuclear weapons.²⁸

Consequently, Marine Corps leaders during the 1960s aimed to ensure that the Marine Corps remained a flexible, general-purpose expeditionary force capable of fighting both counterinsurgencies and conventional wars. For Marines, the prevailing doctrinal guidance on counterinsurgency during this period was *Operations Against Guerrilla Forces, Fleet Marine Force Manual 21*, issued in 1962. As the title indicates, it was not a manual describing how to carry out counterinsurgency operations, but on how to fight guerrillas. Rather than being a comprehensive doctrinal guide to counterinsurgency and small wars as a whole, the manual focused on one discreet part of those types of wars: fighting the insurgent forces. “It will be evidence in such a study that counterinsurgency activity is a prime *element* of a comprehensive counterinsurgency program. It *complements* companion efforts to improve the economic and educational position of a friendly country, and to assist its armed forces in developing their own strength in order to contribute to national stability.”²⁹

Thus, whereas the *Small Wars Manual* expected Marines to be able to conduct the full gamut of small wars operations, from counterinsurgency operations to organizing and monitoring elections, *Operations Against Guerrilla Forces* placed an overwhelming emphasis on defeating guerrilla forces with purely military methods.³⁰ While the manual’s foreword stated that the doctrine “takes its departure from the U.S. Marine Corps publication, *Small Wars Manual*, 1940, and places emphasis on the planning and conduct of operations against guerrillas by Marine Corps forces,” there was little of the *Small Wars Manual*’s guidance on confronting the political and the socioeconomic grievances that often

propelled insurgencies.³¹ Indeed, at this point in time there was comparatively low interest or even awareness of the *Small Wars Manual* within the Corps.³² While *Operations Against Guerrilla Forces* argued that using purely military force could hinder ultimate success, the manual did not go into detail on what nonmilitary means Marines could draw on. The manual largely ignored topics such as civil-military relations, the diplomatic component of small wars, or the administrative duties that counterinsurgents were often forced to undertake to achieve success.

In short, *Operations Against Guerrilla Forces* reflected General Shoup’s guidance with regard to counterinsurgency: the Marine Corps was primarily a force specializing in amphibious warfare. It had the capabilities to conduct counterinsurgency operations when necessary, but it would not radically alter its training in such a way that it could potentially hinder its ability to carry out its primary mission: amphibious assault operations. This general philosophy could be seen throughout a number of official documents and studies. A 1961 memo entitled *U.S. Marines in Guerrilla and Anti-Guerrilla-Type Operations* emphasized this overarching philosophy. The memorandum characterized guerrilla warfare as just one part of conventional operations, and consequently focused on the tactical dimensions of guerrilla wars.³³ In an overview of counterinsurgency campaigns conducted by the Marine Corps, the memo listed actions in Guadalcanal, New Britain, and the Chosin Reservoir alongside the campaigns in Nicaragua and Haiti.³⁴ In a Marine Corps Senior School research project on counterinsurgency operations written in 1964 by Lieutenant Colonel Bruce F. Meyers, the author focused on the need to maintain the Marine Corps’ character as an amphibious assault force by analyzing the potential contributions Marine units could make to fighting in littoral areas and along rivers. Interestingly, the author made a point of differentiating between counterinsurgency and counterinsurgency operations. He wrote,



Official Department of Defense photo
Civic action programs formed a critical component of Marine Corps operations in South Vietnam. In this image, 15 tons of goodwill supplies are turned over to the parish priest of Tra Hieu by 1stLt William H. Gibson and Lt Paul Toland, USN.

“Although counterinsurgency includes within it counter guerrilla operations, the major element of Marine Corps endeavor is expected to be in the counter guerrilla area.”³⁵ In the course of the project, the author also echoed General Shoup’s assertions, writing that “all [Fleet Marine Force] line units, with necessary specialized augmentation, are considered ready and capable of counterinsurgency and counter guerrilla operations.”³⁶

But not all Marines were convinced that counterinsurgency and counter guerrilla warfare did not require any major change in Marine Corps training. Several also disagreed with the general premise that counterinsurgency was a form of warfare best left to others, namely special forces. In fact, many Marines argued that the Marine Corps stood as the U.S. Armed Service best suited for fighting such wars. The rise in interest could be seen in the pages of *Marine Corps Gazette*.³⁷ In 1960, just 10 articles addressed the topic of “guerrillas” in some form or another. In 1961, the number increased to 46. In 1962, the number of articles jumped to 92 before declining

to 82 in 1963 and then averaging out to about 45 articles a year between 1964 and 1966. In January of 1962, the journal devoted a whole issue to the subject. The issue included articles by Peter Paret, Walter W. Rostow, and Major Michael Spark, as well as a selection taken from Mao Tse-Tung on guerrilla warfare.

In his contribution to the January 1962 issue of *Gazette*, Major Spark made his point with brevity and directness: “No force in the world today is better equipped and organized for counter guerrilla operations than the U.S. Marine Corps.”³⁸ While Spark cited the Marine Corps’ experience in small wars in Central America, he focused on the Corps’ ability to deploy as a combined arms air-ground task force. This, combined with austere logistics, the capability to supply forces by air, and the ability of the Marine combat support element to protect itself from guerrilla threats, meant that the Service was the “nation’s ideal counter guerrilla force.”³⁹ The issue proved popular and caught the attention of President Kennedy. The subsequent spike in requests for copies caused by Kennedy’s interest prompted the *Marine Corps Gazette* to compile the articles into a single volume titled *The Guerrilla and How to Fight Him*.⁴⁰

During this same period, a number of Marines also questioned the principle that battling insurgents was no different than fighting conventional wars. In January 1963, the *Marine Corps Gazette* published the article “Counter-insurgency: Fighting the Abstract War,” jointly authored by Marine Corps Major General Victor H. Kru-lak, G. K. Tanham, and a veteran of France’s wars of decolonization, Colonel David Galula. Kru-lak, who at the time was a special assistant for counterinsurgency at the Joint Chiefs of Staff, described counterinsurgency as a fundamentally different kind of war:

Never before, however, have we been dedicated to winning a global war where the battleground is not some identifiable geographic area but is found in the hearts



Photo by SSgt C. Durie

Marines worked closely with local South Vietnamese forces in their war against the Communist forces. This image depicts a Vietnamese police chief, an interpreter, and Marine 1stLt Paul R. Ek discussing a future assault on a suspected Viet Cong stronghold in September 1965.

of thousands of small and simple people. Never before, moreover, has the capture or liberation of territory been completely subordinated, as a national goal, to winning the convictions of men, whose loyalty and good will are themselves the full measure of victory.⁴¹

Krulak's assessment also stressed the political dimensions of counterinsurgency. "The winning of this battle involves not just the efforts of the soldier as he destroys the guerrilla, but the resources of the politician, of the propagandist, the economist, and the educator."⁴²

David Galula's contributions to the article reflected the general principles outlined in his semi-

nal work, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Like Krulak, he argued that counterinsurgency was a different kind of war. Unlike conventional wars, it was difficult to ascertain when insurgencies began or even ended. Conflicts with insurgents were asymmetrical in nature, with both sides using radically different tactics. Galula also focused on the political dimensions of counterinsurgency, noting, "In counterinsurgency, military action cannot be separated from political action."⁴³ Civilian control of the counterinsurgency effort was critical, and Galula asserted that allowing the military to command the entire operation would "signal defeat." Instead, "overall responsibility must be given at every level to the civilian who represents the political authority in a political war."⁴⁴

Despite the large number of *Gazette* articles and General Krulak's personal interest in the subject, counterinsurgency did not leave a significant mark on Marine Corps doctrine during the 1960s. Ironically, whereas 92 articles referenced guerrillas in 1962, just 31 referenced the subject in 1968 during the height of the Vietnam War, when the Marine Corps was actually fighting an insurgency. However, although the Marine Corps may not have been writing new doctrine or writing much about the subject of small wars, the Vietnam War forced it to develop innovative methods to fight the counterinsurgency in South Vietnam.

The Vietnam War presented the United States with the dual challenge of fighting a conventional war with the North Vietnamese military and fighting an insurgency against the National Liberation Front. To confront the latter, General Krulak, now the commander of Fleet Marine Force Pacific, proposed a pacification strategy to strengthen local security forces and prevent Communist infiltration.⁴⁵ The strategy was embraced by the Marine commander in South Vietnam, III Marine Amphibious Force's (MAF)⁴⁶ Major General Lewis W. Walt. General William C. Westmoreland, USA, commander of the overall American command in South Vietnam (the Military Assistance Command-Vietnam), was less enthusiastic about Krulak's strategy, however, and pressed the Marines stationed in South Vietnam's northern provinces to engage in search-and-destroy operations against National Liberation Front forces and North Vietnamese regulars. Instead, the Marines focused on developing South Vietnamese military forces to better protect the Vietnamese population and pacify the countryside. Among the most successful innovations for achieving this was the Combined Action Program (CAP), first devised by members of the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, in Phu Bai Province in 1965.⁴⁷ The program, patterned on the Marine Corps' experience in Haiti and Nicaragua and on the joint companies created by the British dur-

ing the Malayan Emergency in the 1950s, called for the integration of a Marine rifle squad with a South Vietnamese Popular Forces (PF) platoon.⁴⁸ Soon, CAP platoons and companies were operating throughout the I Corps area of responsibility and proved to be an effective means for acquiring intelligence and building close working relationships among the Marines, South Vietnamese soldiers, and the South Vietnamese population. By 1966, 57 such units were operating in the area. The number increased to 79 in 1967.⁴⁹

While CAP platoons and companies were successful, the Marine Corps was responsible for only one tactical zone in South Vietnam. Following the 1968 Tet Offensive and the subsequent election of Richard M. Nixon to the presidency, III MAF began a phased withdrawal from South Vietnam that ended in 1971. The experience in Vietnam had severely depleted the Marine Corps in terms of morale, materiel, and training. The end of the Corps' involvement there thus presented the opportunity for the Marine Corps to redefine its mission and priorities. For another time in its history, the Marine Corps tried to forget unpleasant memories of jungle warfare by renewing its focus on amphibious war and conventional warfighting.

Maneuver Warfare and Low-Intensity Conflict

Between the end of the Vietnam War and the beginning of the 2001 Afghanistan War, Marine Corps leaders were once again embroiled in a debate regarding the Corps' future missions. Eager to avoid involvement in another irregular war in a jungle country, many Marines looked to Europe as a potential theater for future operations. The Marine Corps was not entirely new to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) defensive mission in Europe. Since the 1950s, at least one battalion landing team had served with the Navy's Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean and, beginning in 1966, Marine units began exercises around Norway.⁵⁰ By the 1970s, however, Marine



Photo by Sgt Alicia D. Gruart

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Marine Corps moved away from training for irregular warfare and focused on preparing for a possible war with the Warsaw Pact. The development of light armored battalions equipped with LAV-25 light armored vehicles was one of the more prominent results of this shift to “maneuver warfare.”

planners envisioned a more rigorous commitment to the defense of Europe.

Preparing for a war with the Soviet Union presented a range of challenges, however, as a lightly armed, amphibious air-ground task force seemed ill-suited to fighting a continental war with the Warsaw Pact’s armies. As constituted in the 1970s, a Marine division would likely be wiped out if it fought against massed Soviet armor and artillery in Central Europe.⁵¹ The Marine Corps would thus need to become heavier and more mechanized if it was to make a realistic case for participating in the defense of Western Europe. The introduction of more armored elements into the Corps posed potential problems to the Marines’ primary mission as an amphibious force. A heavy, mechanized Marine Corps would be incapable of conducting rapid, amphibious, and expeditionary

missions, thus undermining its primary mission as America’s force-in-readiness. Furthermore, the introduction of large armored formations meant the Marine Corps had the potential to duplicate the capabilities of the Army, which would then make the Corps redundant.⁵²

The Corps ultimately resolved this problem in two ways. First, it continued to focus its efforts on reinforcing NATO’s flanks in the Mediterranean and North Atlantic. Both the Army’s doctrinal concepts of active defense and AirLand Battle anticipated a massive holding action against the Warsaw Pact in the central plains of Germany in the event of war with the Soviet Union.⁵³ In the event of such a war, NATO’s forces in Europe would be forced to rely on a massive resupply effort across the Atlantic from North America. To protect these supply lines and deny the Soviet

Navy access to the North Atlantic, Marine Corps units were tasked with reinforcing NATO's forces in Norway and Iceland.⁵⁴

The second solution to the challenge of bringing the Marine Corps into the defense of Europe, and of greater significance for the future of the Corps, was the development of maneuver warfare. The concept provided the Marines with a balanced solution to its post-Vietnam War challenges by focusing on speed, maneuver, and mechanization over heavy armor and firepower. Spearheaded by such individuals as William S. Lind and Marine Captain Stephen W. Miller, the concept favored integrating fast, lightly armored vehicles into the Marine Corps to enhance, rather than undermine, its capabilities as a highly mobile force.⁵⁵

During the 1980s, the Marine Corps embraced the maneuver warfare doctrine. In 1980, it procured the General Dynamics LAV-25, a Canadian-designed armored, wheeled vehicle, and activated new light armored infantry battalions. In 1989, it published *Warfighting, Fleet Marine Force Manual 1*. The manual was a succinct, focused summary of the central tenets of maneuver warfare. Its overriding theme was that wars would be short, Marines would likely be outnumbered, and casualties would need to be low to ensure continued domestic support for the war effort.

[The concept of warfighting] requires a concept with which we can succeed against a numerically superior foe, because we can no longer presume a numerical advantage. And, especially in expeditionary situations in which public support for military action may be tepid, and short-lived, it requires a concept with which we can win quickly against a larger foe on his home soil, with minimal casualties and limited external support.⁵⁶

The primary goal of a campaign based on the principles of maneuver warfare was not annihi-

lating the enemy, but shattering his morale and will to wage war. Even if the enemy continued to fight, the manual contended, maneuverability would counteract his ability to organize and impact the course of the war. Maneuver was given precedence over attrition as a means of crippling an enemy's will to fight. The manual stated that

The aim is not an unfocused application of firepower for the purpose of incrementally reducing the enemy's physical strength. Rather, it is the *selective* application of firepower in support of maneuver to contribute to the enemy's shock and moral disruption. The greatest value of firepower is not physical destruction, the cumulative effects of which are felt only slowly, but the moral dislocation it causes.⁵⁷

The overarching principle was speed and mobility. Critically, the manual was broad, flexible, and adaptable. It concluded that

Maneuver warfare is a way of thinking in and about war that should shape our every action. It is a state of mind born of a bold will, intellect, initiative, and ruthless opportunism. It is a state of mind bent on shattering the enemy morally and physically by paralyzing and confounding him, by avoiding his strength, by quickly and aggressively exploiting his vulnerabilities, and by striking him in the way that will hurt him most. In short, maneuver warfare is a philosophy for generating the greatest decisive effect against the enemy at the least possible cost to ourselves—a philosophy for “fighting smart.”⁵⁸

As with the Army's AirLand Battle,⁵⁹ *Warfighting* was originally conceived as a doctrine for fighting the Soviet Union. Yet during the 1980s, the Cold War was still a conflict being fought

primarily in Third World countries. The rise of leftist insurgencies in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala during the 1980s prompted a new wave of interest in counterinsurgency and small wars within the American national security establishment, as well as within the Marine Corps.⁶⁰ These insurgencies were placed under the broader and somewhat imprecise umbrella term “low-intensity conflict.” The National Security Strategy of 1987 summarized the challenge: “Conflict in the Third World can pose serious threats to U.S. security interests. Low-intensity conflicts, which take place at levels below conventional war but above the routine, peaceful competition between states, can be particularly troublesome.”⁶¹ To confront these types of conflicts, the administration proposed conducting a range of political, military, and economic efforts designed to undermine support for insurgencies in Central American states allied with the United States.⁶²

As in the early 1960s, many Marines proposed ways that the Corps could adapt its mission to the Central American small wars and insurgencies. Once more, questions emerged concerning how to prepare for the next war: should the Corps plan for the war it was most likely going to fight (counterinsurgencies in the Third World), or for the one that was a potentially greater existential threat to the United States if it were to break out (a war with the Soviet Union)? In a *Marine Corps Gazette* article from 1986, Major T. X. Hammes came down firmly on the former side, remarking that “counterinsurgency remains the most probable form of conflict facing our Corps today.”⁶³ A few months later, Major Paul Melshen addressed the issue, writing in the *Marine Corps Gazette* in January 1987 that “the threat of nuclear war has kept wars at lower intensities. And because of the continued threat of nuclear war, there is every reason to believe that wars in the future will remain on the lower end of the conflict spectrum.”⁶⁴ In March 1988, the *Gazette* devoted an entire issue to the topic of low-intensity conflict, much as it had devoted a full issue to guerrilla warfare in

1962. The Marine Corps leadership shared these concerns. In 1987, the Marine Corps reprinted the *Small Wars Manual*.⁶⁵ In the September 1987 issue of the *Marine Corps Gazette*, Marine Corps Commandant Alfred M. Gray Jr. wrote,

It is the Third World, the so-called low-intensity conflict arena, where we are most likely to be committed to this decade. . . . You had better break out the manuals and books about how to fight in this arena. . . . It is almost all in Sun Tzu, and I commend him to you. And there’s a lot of it in the book Rommel wrote as a young lieutenant, *Infantry Attacks*. Best of all, perhaps, is our own *Small Wars Manual* written in the 1930s and still available.⁶⁶

Many contributors to the debate questioned what they perceived to be the arbitrary division of warfare into high-intensity combat and low-intensity combat, arguing that low-intensity conflict was a misnomer that undermined the severity of insurgent warfare. In 1989, Lieutenant Colonel Charles L. Armstrong, an advisor during the El Salvador counterinsurgency who had written extensively in the *Gazette* on his experiences, recommended abandoning the term entirely, writing, “What is the point of this arm wrestling over terminology? If we try to develop doctrine for, and participate in, low-intensity warfare we are starting from the wrong baseline. We are acting like the conflict will not really be a war.”⁶⁷ He reinforced the assertion by pointing out that “low-intensity conflict is a contradiction in terms, like jumbo shrimp or sanitary sewers.”⁶⁸

In an article entitled “Insurgency: The Forgotten Threat,” Major Hammes argued that “our current inability to deal with insurgencies represents the greatest threat to the strategic position of the United States.”⁶⁹ Like Armstrong, Hammes found the terminology of low-intensity conflict problematic, writing that the Department of



Photo by Sgt Jones

During his term as Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen Alfred M. Gray Jr., focused on adapting the Marine Corps to the principles of maneuver warfare. At the same time, however, he also stressed that Marines needed to be prepared to fight irregular wars.

Defense's definition was "so broad it is virtually useless."⁷⁰ In formulating his argument, Hammes drew attention to the fact that, since World War II, insurgencies—much more than conventional wars—had an impact on the strategic balance of power. Among the successful insurgencies listed by Hammes were the Chinese Civil War, the Israeli War of Independence, the Vietnam War, the Cuban Revolution, and the Algerian War. All of these conflicts, Hammes contended, had a dramatic and strategic impact. In contrast, Hammes argued that conventional wars in places like Korea, the Middle East, and the Falklands had maintained the status quo and had not radically upset the basic balance of power.⁷¹

Hammes' examples were problematic in a number of ways. While the insurgency in South Vietnam was certainly a critical element of the war, the conventional war between the forces of the North and South Vietnamese armies was just as decisive, and even more so during that conflict's final years. Also, while one could argue that the status quo was not dramatically altered by the Arab-Israeli Wars of 1956 and 1973, the seizure and occupation of the Sinai Peninsula, West Bank, and Golan Heights by Israeli forces during the Six-Day War would dramatically alter the strategic situation in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, Hammes' overarching argument remained potent. The potential for insurgencies, such as Vietnam and Afghanistan, to dramatically alter the balance of power between the Soviet Union and United States was significant. To confront the challenge, Hammes recommended a "unified, multiagency response led by the Department of State." The influences of both the *Small Wars Manual* and the writings of David Galula could be detected throughout Hammes' recommendations, which included such maxims as "Political goals are paramount" and "All civil affairs must be conducted under the control of local civil authorities."⁷²

As with many of his predecessors in the Corps during the 1960s, Hammes argued that the Marine Corps should serve as the nation's primary counterinsurgency force. As a rapid-reaction force backed by the Navy, the Marine Corps' air-ground task force was "the logical choice" for such missions. Furthermore, the Corps was primarily an infantry force capable of drawing on substantial logistical and aviation assets, thus giving it an expeditionary and task-oriented capability suitable for future small wars. At the same time, naval support meant that Marine expeditionary assets could be based at sea, and consequently avoid "the political, social, and economic damage inflicted on a country by the presence of thousands of U.S. troops."⁷³



Photo by Sgt Alicia D. Gruart

Col Thomas X. Hammes (pictured here in 2001) wrote a number of articles exhorting the Marines to strengthen its abilities in counterinsurgency. In 1986, he wrote: "... counterinsurgency remains the most probable form of conflict facing our Corps today."

Hammes was not alone in making these arguments. During the same period, analysts such as William S. Lind and Marines such as Lieutenant Colonel Gary I. Wilson and Captain John F. Schmitt contended that the very nature of war itself was changing. According to this view, first summarized in the *Marine Corps Gazette* article "The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation," war evolved generationally. The first generation, marked by well-drilled line formations designed to maximize the firepower of smoothbore muskets, gave way to a second generation defined by breech-loading, rifled firearms, machine guns, and indirect fire. In contrast, third-generation warfare focused on maneuver, mobility, and infiltration, rather than on attrition.⁷⁴ Fourth-generation warfare was slowly emerging in the form of non-state actors and insurgent forces. The authors wrote,

In broad terms, fourth-generation warfare seems likely to be widely dispersed and largely undefined; the distinction between war and peace will be blurred to the vanishing point. It will be nonlinear, possibly to the point of having no definable battlefields or fronts. The distinction between "civilian" and "military" may disappear.⁷⁵

Whereas the Ronald Reagan administration and adherents of the concept of low-intensity conflict saw insurgencies and counterinsurgencies as subordinate operations to larger, conventional conflicts, writers such as Lind and Hammes saw these challenges as not only constituting a new kind of war, but also the norm for future conflicts. Nonstate, transnational forces

using asymmetrical strategies and tactics to counteract American technological superiority were the critical threats to the United States and to nation-states throughout the world. The concept was further developed a year later by Martin van Creveld, who argued in *The Transformation of War* that the Clausewitzian focus on the state was an inadequate means for analyzing and understanding wars in the face of declining nation-state power.⁷⁶ A decade later, Hammes would make another important contribution to the debate with *The Sling and the Stone*, once again emphasizing that irregular insurgent forces were the primary threat faced by U.S. forces.⁷⁷ Despite this, the United States remained ill prepared to battle this most likely enemy.

The debates over low-intensity conflict reached a peak during the late 1980s before largely fading out by the beginning of the 1990s. In 1991, the Marine Corps participated in the largest engagement of American military forces since the Vietnam War during Operation Desert Storm. The Marines of I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) proved their capabilities against a Soviet-equipped Iraqi Army. The war seemed to vindicate those planners who prepared for a brief, clearly defined conflict with a decisive conclusion (although that conclusion was less decisive than it seemed at the time). Furthermore, it reinforced Marine Corps planners' belief that a focus on maneuver warfare was the appropriate and best means for preparing the Corps for future wars. Even though Desert Storm did not entirely conform to the vision of a war of maneuver as described in the manual, it saw the first use of Marine light armored infantry formations in combat.

Once again though, events seemed to contradict these assumptions and reinforce the arguments being made by Hammes, Lind, and others that asserted insurgencies would be threats of the future. Throughout the George H. W. Bush and William J. Clinton administrations, Marines were involved in a variety of so-called low-intensity engagements, most notably in Somalia and

in Haiti. These missions were a mix of military engagement and humanitarian aid. During this same period, Marine Corps squadrons participated in patrols of the no-fly zones over Iraq and flew combat missions over Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo during the wars that erupted in the wake of Yugoslavia's dissolution. Marine ground combat units also contributed to the defense of Kuwait throughout the 1990s.

Conclusion

Throughout its more than 200-year-long history, the Marine Corps has often struggled to define its primary purpose in relation to the other Armed Services. As a result, Marines have been involved in a wide variety of military missions, ranging from large-scale conventional wars to small wars and insurgencies. The Marine Corps' history during much of the twentieth century was dominated by conventional warfare. The campaigns in Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Iwo Jima, and Inchon shaped the Marine Corps' mission and legacy as the United States' premier amphibious assault force. However, the Marine Corps' naval heritage also meant that Marines fought in a significant number of irregular conflicts and small wars throughout the century as well, most prominently in Central America during the 1920s and in South Vietnam during the 1960s.

Consequently, the Marine Corps has a long history of fighting small wars, and such wars have rarely been considered outside of the Marine Corps' mission profile. Nevertheless, most Marine leaders have been hesitant to embrace the small wars mission, feeling that the Marine Corps' best contribution to the national defense was to prepare for a wide variety of threats with a specialization in amphibious warfare. This reticence with regard to small wars was most prominent during the 1930s and 1970s, decades that incidentally came after Marines had fought insurgencies in the Caribbean and South Vietnam, respectively. During the 1930s, Marines chose to devote their energies to preparing for an amphibious drive

across the Pacific in anticipation of a war with Japan, a choice that proved prescient. Beginning in the 1970s, Marine planners focused on preparing the Corps for a war with the Soviet Union.

An important result of this new attention to a mission in Europe was the doctrine of maneuver warfare and the creation of Marine light armored infantry battalions. Both developments allowed the Marine Corps to fight alongside the Army without duplicating the Army's role on the battlefield as the primary land fighting force. However, while maneuver warfare doctrine, codified in 1989 in *Warfighting, Fleet Marine Force Manual 1*, had its origins in the Cold War, it was broad and flexible enough to provide Marines with a general guide for combat during the post-Cold War era.

Furthermore, although the Marine Corps focused most of its attention on fighting a large war with the Soviets, many Marines served as advisors in counterinsurgencies, especially in Central America. For these Marines and many others, future wars would look much more like the ones they faced in the Third World and not like a conventional, big-unit fight (although China and North Korea remained potential conventional threats). As the Cold War quickly came to an end, many Marines and analysts outside the Corps began to speak of "fourth-generation warfare" and future conflicts against nonstate actors. Meanwhile, the Marine Corps as a whole began to adjust to the new realities of the post-Cold War era.

Chapter 2

Marine Corps Warfighting Concepts from 1991 to 2002

The decade before 11 September 2001 seemed to confirm the assessment made in *Warfighting, Fleet Marine Force Manual 1* that future U.S. military operations would be brief and intense engagements defined by maneuver, mobility, and use of precision fires.¹ Between the end of Operation Desert Storm and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the U.S. military largely faced small-scale contingency operations that were relatively short in duration. The operations varied in terms of intensity and included the 1991–92 intervention in Somalia, the 1994–95 intervention in Haiti, and the bombing campaigns and subsequent peacekeeping operations in the Balkans in 1995 and 1999. The decade-long patrols of the no-fly zones over Iraq were an exception in terms of duration. A 2002 Marine Corps combat assessment written following the first operations in Afghanistan summarized this state of affairs well, noting that “with the exception of Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm, since the end of the Cold War the threat environments encountered by forward deployed [Marine air-ground task forces] have generally been characterized as low-intensity conflicts, often operations under restrictive peacetime rules of engagement. They have been of relatively short duration, with limited operational objectives.”²

The end of the Cold War forced the United States to redefine the primary mission and purpose of its military, which had been designed and trained to fight the Soviet Union. Both the Marine Corps and Navy developed a range of new concepts and innovations that altered the focus of the United States’ naval services. The purpose of these changes was to shift from planning to fight enemy navies to planning for contingencies



Photo by Sgt B. E. Vancise

During his term, Marine Corps Commandant Gen Charles C. Krulak stressed the need for the Marine Corps to be versatile and readily adaptable to the wide variety of contingencies the United States would face in the post-Cold War era. He introduced the concept of a “three-block war” and the idea of the “strategic corporal.”

along the coastlines of potentially hostile or unstable states. These contingencies would require the U.S. naval services to perform a wide variety of missions ranging from raids, peacekeeping operations, humanitarian assistance, and evacuations. Both the Marine Corps and its Combat Development Command developed concepts to meet these new challenges, among them the three-block war and expeditionary maneuver warfare.³

Thus, although the Marine Corps did not focus special attention on small wars or counter-insurgency, it did make plans to conduct unconventional operations. Planners aimed to create a flexible Corps capable of fighting a range of missions, including insurgencies. This aim could be discerned through the papers and concepts written and presented by Marine Corps leaders throughout the decade and in the course of instruction at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College. The 11 September 2001 attacks and the subsequent war in Afghanistan did not dramatically alter the objective of building the amphibious Service into an adaptable and effective expeditionary force-in-readiness.

Concepts for Building a General-Purpose Contingency Force

One of the most enduring warfighting concepts to emerge during the 1990s was the idea of a three-block war. First presented by General Charles C. Krulak, Commandant of the Marine Corps from 1995 to 1999, the concept predicted that future wars would be akin to those that were fought in Haiti and Somalia.

In Bosnia, Haiti, and Somalia the unique challenges of *military operations other-than-war* (MOOTW) were combined with the disparate challenges of mid-intensity conflict. The Corps has described such amorphous conflicts as—*the three-block war*—contingencies in which Marines may be confronted by the entire spectrum of tactical challenges in the span of a few hours and within the space of three contiguous city blocks.⁴

General Krulak's assessment was notable for a number of reasons. First, the concept of the three-block war acknowledged the wide variety of missions Marines would be asked to undertake in the politically uncertain post-Cold War world. Second, Krulak's argument that the "strategic cor-

poral" would be a critical factor in how these operations other-than-war would be fought placed a new emphasis on the need for effective small-unit leaders who could devise and implement orders in an increasingly complex battlefield environment. "The inescapable lesson of Somalia and of other recent operations, whether humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, or traditional warfighting, is that their outcome may hinge on decisions made by small-unit leaders and by actions taken at the *lowest level*."⁵ Once again, the Marine Corps' traditions of focusing on creating well-led small units capable of fighting a range of challenges seemed to provide a solution to emerging and unanticipated problems around the world.

Another influential Marine warfighting model to emerge in the post-Cold War world was expeditionary maneuver warfare. The concept drew together nearly 30 years of doctrinal innovation and development and laid the foundation for a general-purpose Marine Corps capable of conducting a wide variety of missions. The concept was initially circulated during General James L. Jones' tenure as Commandant.⁶ Expeditionary maneuver warfare collected and synthesized a diverse range of concepts, but two stood out most prominently: maneuver warfare and expeditionary operations. The concept placed a premium on the Marine Corps' naval character and its ability to deploy quickly from sea-based positions. Importantly, expeditionary maneuver warfare sought to adapt and refine the maneuver warfare concept for a post-Cold War world. According to the 2001 Marine Corps *Concepts and Issues*,

Built on the twin pillars of our philosophy of maneuver warfare and our expeditionary culture, [Expeditionary Maneuver Warfare] prepares the Marine Corps to meet the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly changing world. The concept describes the evolving characteristics and capabilities that the Marine Corps will employ to promote peace and stability



Photo by Sgt Craig J. Shell

For the most part, military operations during the 1990s were short-term contingencies, such as the NATO intervention in the Serbian province of Kosovo in 1999. In this image, a Marine from Company K, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, mans an observation post in the city of Gnjilane, Kosovo, to help enforce the peace during Operation Joint Guardian.

and to mitigate or resolve crises. More fundamentally, [Expeditionary Maneuver Warfare] provides an intellectual foundation that will influence how Marines, both individually and as an institution, analyze, understand, and formulate solutions across the spectrum of military operations.⁷

The concept was also the culmination of nearly a decade of renewed focus on the Marine Corps' ability to project power from the sea. Concepts such as "operational maneuver from the sea" and "ship-to-shore objective" attested to the Navy and Marine Corps' interest in planning for unconventional threats and contingencies.⁸ As the 1997 paper *Operational Maneuver from the Sea* noted, "In all other respects—goals, organizations, armament, and tactics—the warfare of the next 20 years will be distinguished by its great

variety. For that reason, it is imperative that the Marine Corps resist the temptation to prepare for only one type of conflict."⁹ The paper envisioned an often chaotic, unpredictable threat environment concentrated along the potentially volatile coastal regions of the world. Here, Marines would likely not fight soldiers from conventional militaries, but irregular "fighters" struggling on behalf of an ethnic, religious, or tribal group rather than a nation-state. Consequently, a versatile amphibious force could play an important role in American national security. "To influence events overseas, America requires a credible, forwardly deployable, power projection capability. In the absence of an adjacent land base, a sustainable forcible entry capability that is independent of forward staging bases, friendly borders, overflight rights, and other politically dependent support can come only from the sea."¹⁰

The foundations for this expeditionary capability were the amphibious ready group, Marine air-ground task force, and maritime prepositioning force. The idea of the maritime prepositioning force had emerged during the 1970s and 1980s. At any given time, the equipment for at least three brigade-size air-ground task forces was afloat aboard three squadrons from the Military Sealift Command, with each squadron responsible for a specific geographic area. The force thus maximized the power projection capabilities of Marine Corps air-ground task forces throughout the globe. Utilizing the forward maritime prepositioning force for logistical support, Marine air-ground task forces were integrated with Navy amphibious squadrons to create amphibious ready groups. Typically, these ready groups were built around a big-deck amphibious assault ship (a *Tarawa*-class landing helicopter assault carrier or a *Wasp*-class landing helicopter dock carrier), supported by a landing ship dock and a landing ship transport dock.

Afloat with the ready group would be a Marine air-ground task force, in most cases a Marine expeditionary unit (MEU). Known within the Marine Corps by their acronym, MAGTF (pronounced “Magtaf”), these task forces comprised a command element, a ground combat element, an aviation combat element, and a combat support element, and ranged from 1,500 to 90,000 Marines, depending on the threat situation and mission requirements.¹¹ The MEU was the smallest of the MAGTFs. Commanded by a colonel, an MEU’s ground element consisted of a Marine rifle battalion reinforced with tanks, amphibious assault vehicles, antiarmor teams, and engineers, and was called a battalion landing team (BLT). The air combat element of an MEU was a composite squadron of fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft. These included Sikorsky CH-53E Sea Stallion heavy-lift helicopters, Boeing CH-46D Sea Knight medium-lift helicopters, Bell AH-1 Super Cobra gunships, Bell UH-1 Iroquois light helicopters, and McDonnell Douglass AV-8B Harrier vertical takeoff and landing jump jets. A

Marine expeditionary unit service support group also provided MEUs with logistical support to enable the force to operate independently for 15 days. Their primary function was to provide joint commanders with a rapidly deployable force capable of performing stability, disaster relief, and peacekeeping operations.¹²

The largest MAGTF, the Marine expeditionary force (MEF), was commanded by a lieutenant general and made up of a Marine division, a Marine aircraft wing, and a Marine force service support group. Whereas Marine expeditionary units were designed primarily for rapid deployment to confront contingencies in a quick and decisive manner, the Marine expeditionary force’s major purpose was to conduct independent operations in a theater-size war. As a result, the MEF could sustain itself for about 60 days. Larger than an expeditionary unit but smaller than an expeditionary force was the Marine expeditionary brigade (MEB), a formation normally composed of a reinforced regiment, composite aircraft group, and a brigade combat service support group.¹³ Expeditionary brigades were frequently task organized, however, and did not always conform to this structure.¹⁴

In 2001, there were three standing Marine expeditionary forces¹⁵ (each with an attached expeditionary brigade that could serve as a forward echelon), and seven standing Marine expeditionary units. Two to three expeditionary units were forward deployed and afloat with an amphibious ready group at any given time, maximizing the Marine Corps’ crisis response capabilities. Before deploying, each MEU also underwent a six-month training period, which ended with a “special operations capable” certification.¹⁶ The expeditionary units afloat constituted the spearhead of the Marine’s rapid deployment and emergency response capability.

The operational maneuver from the sea and expeditionary maneuver warfare concepts brought together a number of doctrinal currents. The first, expeditionary operations, had in many ways been



Photo by PH3 M. Dennis Timms, USN

Sea-based Marine expeditionary units formed the linchpin of expeditionary maneuver warfare. In this image of the USS Bataan (LHD 5) amphibious assault ship, one can see the wide variety of assets at the disposal of the Marines during the 1990s and 2000s: (from left to right) CH-46 medium helicopters, UH-1 light helicopters, AH-1 helicopter gunships, CH-53 heavy helicopters, and AV-8B jump jets.

a part of the Marine Corps since its very creation, a fact demonstrated by its long history as a sea-based, rapidly deployable military force and by the hundreds of amphibious landings conducted by Marines since the late eighteenth century.¹⁷ The second current, maneuver warfare, was a more recent innovation, as seen in the previous chapter. Despite its Cold War origins, however, maneuver warfare was broad and flexible (some critics would argue vague) enough in design and conception that it could be applied to the types of operations Marines anticipated facing in the post-Cold War era without any major revisions.¹⁸ The 1997 revision of *Warfighting*, (renumbered as *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1*) featured

only limited changes, with more detailed descriptions about the nature of war and the styles of warfare.¹⁹ Its overall emphasis on mobility, speed, and on shattering the enemy's will to fight without resorting to a war of attrition lent itself well to a force anticipating future short-term contingency operations defined by political and diplomatic goals over purely military ones.

Throughout the 1990s, Marine Corps leaders also made attempts to adapt the concepts of network-centric and effects-based warfare to the maneuver warfare doctrine. Both concepts had gained popularity since Operation Desert Storm. Although they differed from one another in a number of ways, both concepts shared a be-

lief that psychological and moral “effects” could have as great an impact as the large-scale physical destruction of the enemy’s infrastructure and warfighting capabilities. They both also placed a premium on the technological superiority of American military forces. Coupling the superior information- and intelligence-sharing capabilities of the U.S. military with highly precise munitions, the advocates for effects-based operations argued that future wars would require smaller and lighter U.S. forces.²⁰

Many Marine leaders believed that maneuver warfare shared much in common with “effects-based” warfare. A presentation given at the 1999 Marine Corps General Officers Symposium integrated the concept of net-centric warfare with operational maneuver from the sea and maneuver warfare, declaring that “a Network-Centric structure complements the [Operational Maneuver from the Sea Concept] by allowing all U.S. forces within the theater, in addition to naval forces, to support the landing force via precision engagement, logistical offloading, and enhanced battlespace awareness.”²¹

The presentation cast a stark distinction between “attrition warfare” and “maneuver warfare,” and saw the latter as an extension of network-centric war. Attrition warfare focused on physical impact and was defined by a “rigid, top-down, centralized planning and execution.”²² Attrition warfare featured only “limited interoperability” and “stove-piped battle systems.” In contrast, maneuver warfare “focused on reason and belief effects.” It was “network centric” and employed force “through movement in combination with firepower.” If attrition warfare’s main characteristics were firepower, rigidity, and physical effects, the presentation argued, then maneuver warfare was focused on speed, surprise, and psychological effects. The 2001 Marine Corps *Concepts and Issues* further stressed the link between expeditionary maneuver warfare and effects-based warfare, declaring, “Unlike traditional operations, [Expeditionary Maneuver Warfare] focuses on maxi-

mizing the effects of operations, rather than the mere destruction of an adversary’s military forces or the mitigation of a single aspect of a humanitarian disaster.”²³

The election of George W. Bush to the presidency in 2000 brought new initiatives to how the military prepared and fought wars. Bush’s first secretary of defense, Donald H. Rumsfeld, was a forceful advocate of transformation, an ambitious policy that aimed to shift the military away from its supposed Cold War-era mind-set by making it more mobile and easier to deploy. One could discern the underlying principles of network-centric warfare and effects-based warfare within the Department of Defense’s plans. To achieve his goals, Rumsfeld hoped to draw on new technologies and innovations that would increase the lethality of the U.S. military while also decreasing its size and reliance on heavy forces.²⁴

The transformation initiatives did not cause a considerable break in the general trends dominating Marine Corps planning that had begun as far back as the 1970s. The Marine Corps, planners argued, was “expeditionary by culture—transformational by design.”²⁵ Furthermore, as seen above, some of the major currents in Marine Corps planning reflected many of Rumsfeld’s transformation initiatives: smaller, lighter forces utilizing mobility and precision-guided munitions to break the enemy’s will to fight and ensure a brief and decisive campaign.²⁶ Not all Marines were convinced that maneuver warfare was a perfect fit for “net-centric” and “effects-based” warfare, however, and a number criticized what they saw as an overemphasis on information warfare and technological innovation on the part of the Department of Defense. They also criticized the assumption that using both could overcome the unpredictability and friction of warfare.²⁷

Of greater concern for Marines at this time was not that the Corps would have to significantly undergo transformation, but that its uniqueness would be diluted as the other Services changed and adapted. This predated Rumsfeld’s tenure, as



Official Department of Defense photo

Upon assuming office as secretary of defense in 2001, Donald H. Rumsfeld sought to transform the military, using new technologies and innovations to increase the lethality of the U.S. military while also decreasing its size and reliance on heavy forces.

the Army had begun to stand up more light infantry divisions during the 1980s. The expansion of these units, such as the 6th and 7th Infantry Divisions, allowed the Army to take a greater role in contingency operations, operations that had traditionally been the provenance of the Marine Corps. Many Marines were quick to argue that the ability to rapidly deploy did not necessarily grant a unit a truly expeditionary capability.²⁸ A Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory assessment of the United States Army's Transformation War Game held in 2001 reflects this argument. The briefing, delivered to assess the implications to the Marine Corps of the Army's approach to the Defense Department's transformation initiatives, criticized the war gamers for failing to completely embrace the full capabilities of sea-based Marine expeditionary units. The overall

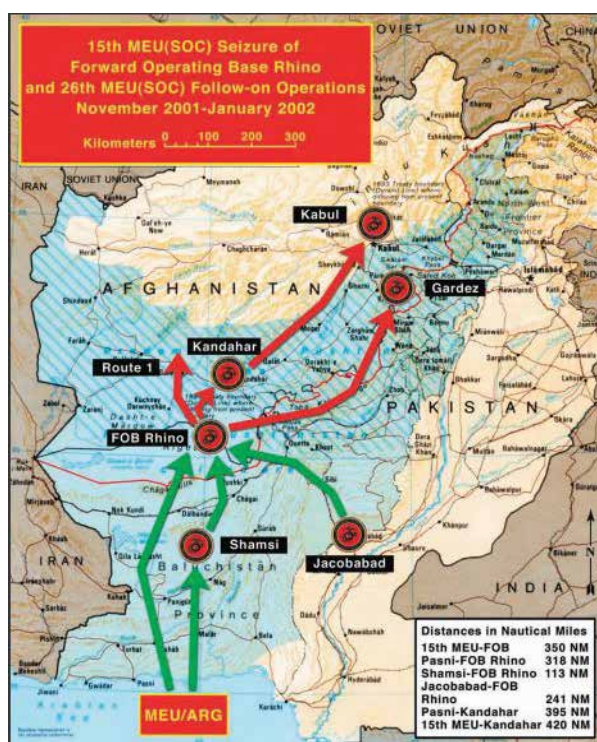
conclusions were intriguing. What concerned the Warfighting Laboratory was not that the Marine Corps would have to radically alter its mission and abilities in response to the Defense Department. Of greater concern was that, if the Army became lighter and more mobile, it would potentially duplicate the Marine Corps' mission, inverting the decade-long tension between the two Services. "Army and Marine Corps core competencies are converging,"²⁹ the briefing observed. "One of the pillars of the Marine Corps' existence and survival as a separate service with a major warfighting role is that it not become, or be perceived, as a second land army. This has been a core sensitivity for the Marine Corps leadership since World War II. It would be ironic if the issue were again joined by the Army becoming 'a second Marine Corps.'"³⁰

***Operation Enduring Freedom:
A Proof of Concept for Expeditionary
Maneuver Warfare?***

Donald H. Rumsfeld was secretary of defense for less than nine months when terrorists from Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda organization destroyed the World Trade Center in New York City and attacked the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, on 11 September 2001. The United States immediately took action against Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, which had provided bin Laden with support and sustained his organization on its territory.

Although President George W. Bush declared that the war against the Taliban regime was a "different kind of war,"³¹ the military force deployed to fight it was one primarily designed to confront the limited contingency operations of the 1990s. The Marine Corps' most significant involvement in the first year of the Global War on Terrorism, Task Force 58's insertion and seizure of forward operating bases in Afghanistan, was an important demonstration of the Corps' ability to quickly deploy from a sea base and conduct a rapid airlift inland to establish a tactical foothold in hostile territory. It thus demonstrated that the Marine Corps had embraced many of the philosophical and doctrinal tenets that had been shaping the Corps throughout the 1990s.

The Marine Corps' contributions to the war in Afghanistan demonstrated the efficacy of speed and mobility as a means of defeating the enemy. Operation Enduring Freedom, U.S. Central Command's code name for the campaign in Afghanistan, focused on two broad goals: overthrowing the Taliban regime and destroying the state's ability to support al-Qaeda. To achieve these objectives, Central Command commander General Tommy R. Franks, USA, planned a largely ad hoc operation that combined special operations forces, anti-Taliban resistance forces, and conventional forces in a multiphased plan.³² The Marine Corps provided Central Command with a number of forces afloat, including two Marine



Official Marine Corps History Division map

expeditionary units, with two more preparing for deployment.³³ Both units were deployed in the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks.³⁴ By November, U.S. Central Command drew up plans to utilize Marine Corps units in Afghanistan, and the commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command established Task Force 58 under the command of Brigadier General James N. Mattis. For the first time, a Marine commanded a naval task force. The force consisted of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade (1st MEB), divided into two Marine expeditionary units, each attached to an amphibious ready group.³⁵

On 25 November 2001, elements of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (15th MEU [SOC]) with supporting elements from the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (26th MEU [SOC]) took off from the amphibious assault carrier USS *Peleliu* (LHA 5) in six Sikorsky CH-53E Super Stallions and seized a landing strip in southern Afghanistan designated Forward Operating Base Rhino. The helicopterborne assault



Photo by LCpl Brian L. Wickliffe

In November 2001, using six CH-53 Super Stallions like the one pictured here, elements of the 1st MEB successfully travelled more than 350 nautical miles from amphibious assault ships in the Indian Ocean and seized a forward position deep within Afghanistan. The operation demonstrated the viability of sea-based operations and operational maneuver from the sea.

would take the Marine expeditionary unit 371.5 nautical miles inland.³⁶ On 14 December, elements of the 26th MEU (SOC) seized Kandahar Airfield.³⁷ For the next two months, Task Force 58 conducted operations throughout Afghanistan, maintaining Coalition supply lines, engaging enemy convoys, and helping to prevent Kandahar from being used as an escape route for the retreating Taliban forces.³⁸

Task Force 58's insertion into Afghanistan during the opening phases of Operation Enduring Freedom attested to the effectiveness of many principles shaping the Marine Corps at that time.³⁹ Deputy Commandant, Installations and Logistics, Lieutenant General Gary S. Mc Kissock wrote that the operation demonstrated the effectiveness of sea basing and was the culmination of nearly three decades of Marine and Navy planning and innovations.⁴⁰ Lieutenant Colonel Frank G. Hoffman concurred, noting in *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* that Task Force 58's insertion demonstrated the effectiveness of ship-to-objective maneuver operations.⁴¹

However, while the operation demonstrated that the Marine Corps had successfully integrated many of the principles laid out in *Warfighting*, there was also concern that these principles were potentially unsuited for the Afghanistan War. The combat assessment team deployed to gather lessons from the operation reinforced this point when it observed, "The forward-deployed MEU (SOC) organization is geared to relatively short-duration operations."⁴² Of particular concern to the assessment team were the challenges of conducting a long-term campaign to secure Afghanistan using a force designed for short-term contingency operations. The report's writers observed, "Like other open-ended operational commitments since the end of the Cold War, OEF does not lend itself to a clear exit strategy, partly because of the absence of a measurable definition of victory itself."⁴³ The open-ended nature of the operation troubled observers, and the assessment team noted that "given current force levels, any increases in duration or frequency of these contingencies may jeopardize a delicate balance of

training readiness, personnel tempo, and strategic flexibility for the Corps as a force provider.”⁴⁴

The operation up to that point also left many open-ended questions. While the operation demonstrated the ability of a Marine air-ground team to seize a forward position across considerable distance, the Marine air-ground task forces deployed to Afghanistan faced only minimal enemy resistance. As the official combat summary noted, Enduring Freedom provided only limited lessons with regard to expeditionary maneuver warfare:

Although the 15th and 26th MEU (SOC)’s demonstration of operational reach over 350 nautical miles inland during OEF is an impressive display of tactical flexibility, operational reach, and logistical adaptability, the threat environment never materialized that might have stressed the combat systems to their limits.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the same report remarked that “the Corps’ accomplishments during [Operation Enduring Freedom] confirmed the relevance of [Expeditionary Maneuver Warfare] and the soundness of the Marine Corps’ approach to the DoD’s transformation initiatives.”⁴⁶

Thus, there was considerable uncertainty in the Marine Corps regarding whether or not the first several months of Operation Enduring Freedom would be the model for future operations against al-Qaeda and Islamist-backed terrorism. The question remained: was the operation in Afghanistan really a “different kind of war” or was it another short-term contingency operation akin to the operations in the Balkans? For a large number of observers affiliated with the Marine Corps, the war that began with the al-Qaeda attacks portended a break with the past decade of conflict. Critically, these analysts focused attention on the new challenges of fighting a nonstate actor like al-Qaeda. Within days of 11 September, William Lind, one of the intellectual architects of maneuver warfare and fourth-generation

warfare theory, declared that the terrorist attacks were “Fourth-Generation Warfare’s First Blow.”⁴⁷ Frank G. Hoffman forcefully argued in *Marine Corps Gazette* that the plans and assumptions of the 1990s needed to be discarded, asserting that in “its place, a sense of urgency must take hold, matched by a grim determination to refashion America’s security structures for an era where the forces of chaos and order exist side by side.”⁴⁸

The Operation Enduring Freedom assessment team was also aware that Marines were facing a decidedly unconventional threat, and characterized the enemies in Afghanistan as “simple, but not naïve,” and as “adept practitioners of the art of asymmetric warfare.”⁴⁹ The team recognized al-Qaeda was an unconventional force that defied “the conventional assumptions around which most of the world’s militaries organize, train, and equip.”⁵⁰ While recognizing that the enemies in the Global War on Terrorism would likely be unconventional, irregular forces, Marines were unsure about whether Operation Enduring Freedom would be typical of future operations in the battle against Islamist radicalism:

The characteristic traits of [Operation Enduring Freedom] differ substantially from major wars of the 20th Century, which the majority of the world’s armed forces were designed to fight. In light of these distinguishing features, two questions arise that are vital to selection and application of appropriate lessons learned. First, how closely does the conflict experienced in [Operation Enduring Freedom] and the [Global War on Terror] foreshadow the nature of war in the future? Second, how well do[es] the Marine Corps’ concept meet the challenge presented by this type of warfare?⁵¹

Thus many Marines believed that the Global War on Terrorism and the conflict in Afghanistan constituted a break from the types of wars



Photo by Sgt Joseph R. Chenelly

Marines from the 15th MEU (SOC) on patrol in Afghanistan in heavily armed High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles and light armored vehicles in December 2001. During the initial phase of the Afghanistan War, a debate emerged amongst policy makers regarding whether conventional forces or special forces were better suited to conducting the Global War on Terrorism.

the United States had been fighting over the past several decades. However, they drew a variety of different lessons from this conclusion.

For a number of observers, the lessons of the Afghanistan conflict were that future wars would be fought by small U.S. forces maintaining a light, unobtrusive footprint but nevertheless equipped to deploy intensive firepower when necessary. Major Lloyd D. Freeman, for example, argued that the heavy use of special operations forces in Operation Enduring Freedom was evidence that the Marine Corps needed to bolster its small units and create squads and platoons able to operate independently and to be capable of using technological advantages to deploy heavy firepower through the use of air strikes.⁵² The operations proposed in his article would have been air-intensive, with a heavy reliance on laser-guided and global positioning system-guided bombs. Captain Owen West made a similar argument,

contending that the Marine Corps had been relegated to a supporting force in Afghanistan while special operations forces had taken the lead role. The future counterterrorism mission was becoming a fiefdom of the U.S. Special Operations Command. “The Marine Corps played the hare to the SOCOM tortoise,” he lamented.⁵³ He further predicted that “the next Smedley Butler will come from SOCOM, not the Marine Corps.”⁵⁴ The solution, West warned, was not to embrace Special Operations Command. The Marine expeditionary unit remained “the best positioned forces to tackle the Global War on Terrorism.”⁵⁵

The Operation Enduring Freedom combat assessment team also noted U.S. forces’ heavy reliance on small, special operations units directing precision fires. The team acknowledged that “some observers suggested that [Operation Enduring Freedom] reversed the support roles between air and ground forces so that the primary

role of ground forces has become location and designation of targets for destruction by air.”⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the report pointed out that several missions, such as airfield seizure, detainee operations, and the interdiction of isolated groups, could only be accomplished by forces on the ground.

The combat assessment team continued an important precedent for future Marine Corps operations. Their report constituted the first major assessment of Marine Corps operations in combat since the battle assessment team’s analysis of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, which had been assembled by Colonel Clifford L. Stanley.⁵⁷ As the deputy commanding general of Marine Corps Combat Development Command in 2002, Stanley, now a major general, oversaw a second major assessment of combat operations. Both were products of the Marine Corps lessons learned system. In the final report, the Enduring Freedom Combat Assessment Team recommended a revision to the manner in which the Marine Corps acquired and disseminated “lessons learned” from its operations. The team proposed a Center for Marine Corps Lessons Learned that would be able to record, create, manage, and categorize lessons learned “in exercises, operations, and day-to-day experiences.”⁵⁸ The combat assessment team would form the core of the future center, which would continue to acquire and organize lessons learned from further operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The vast distance and speed of the 1st MEB’s insertion into Afghanistan in 2001 demonstrated that the Marine Corps could execute operations based on the principles of expeditionary maneuver warfare. At the same time though, there were a range of unanswered questions regarding the future course of the Global War on Terrorism. Was Operation Enduring Freedom an extension of the contingency operations of the 1990s or an entirely new kind of war? Would special operations forces be the standard combatant force? Would effects-based surgical strikes and preci-



Official Department of Defense photo
U.S. Army Special Forces ride alongside Afghan Northern Alliance cavalry during Operation Enduring Freedom. With the assistance of only a small number of U.S. Special Forces coupled with extensive use of air power, the Northern Alliance was able to topple the Taliban regime during the fall of 2001.

sion-guided attacks be the most effective means for defeating fundamentalist terrorist networks like al-Qaeda? If special operations forces were to take the lead in the future war against al-Qaeda and similar organizations, then what role would the Marine Corps play? The period between 2001 and 2003 was thus marked by considerable uncertainty about what the Global War on Terrorism would look like. Consequently, many in the Marine Corps continued to train for contingency operations based on ship-to-shore maneuver warfare, as they had done in the years before 11 September.

Preparing and Training the Marine Corps for Contingency Operations

During the period after the 11 September 2001 attacks, the curricula at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Amphibious Warfare School, and School for Advanced Warfighting continued to focus on the operational and tactical capabilities of the Marine air-ground task force. The stated focus of the Command and Staff College’s curriculum was “the development of an officer who understands the capabilities and po-

tential roles of the Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF) at the operational level of war and how to best task organize, deploy, and employ these forces in any tactical environment across the spectrum of conflict.”⁵⁹ The first-year program included the courses The Theory and Nature of War, Strategy and Policy, The Operational Level of War, and a six-part course titled Warfighting from the Sea, which focused on teaching Marine officers the planning processes for offensive, defensive, expeditionary, and joint operations using a Marine air-ground task force.⁶⁰ During the 2003–4 academic year, the course block made up 601.5 of the total 1,542 hours, more than a third of the course hours.⁶¹

The 2002–3 Command and Staff College syllabus provides a good example of the basic focus and thrust of staff officer education in the Marine Corps at the turn of the century. The Warfighting from the Sea sequence of courses constituted 529.25 hours of the 1,516 course hours at the Command and Staff College, a little more than one-third. It was divided into six groupings. Joint and Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) Organization (75 hours) provided students with lectures on the basic structures of the air-ground task force, the principles of maneuver warfare, effects-based operations, fourth-generation warfare, and asymmetric war. Marine Corps Planning Process and Defensive Operations (77.75 hours) included classes on shaping operations, fighting battles, intelligence preparation, defensive operations, and force protection. Marine Corps Planning Process and Offensive Operations (50.50 hours) focused on offensive operations and MEF fires. Marine Corps Planning Process and Expeditionary Operations (96.25 hours) provided students with a comprehensive and detailed overview of the Marine air-ground task force’s primary mission as a force-in-readiness, and included classes on amphibious warfare, the maritime prepositioning force, logistics in expeditionary operations, and also included an expeditionary warfare practical application. Joint

Operations and Military Operations Other Than War completed the sequence.⁶²

The Command and Staff College’s course of study focused primarily on conventional warfare.

Classes examining historic campaigns focused on large-scale amphibious landings such as Operation Cartwheel (the Solomons campaign, 1943), Operation Husky (invasion of Sicily, 1943), and Operation Chromite (Inchon, 1950). Students also gained knowledge and training in the operational conduct of World War I and World War II. Small wars and irregular warfare was not ignored entirely, however. The course Joint and Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) Organization included lectures on the asymmetric threat and fourth-generation warfare. Most importantly, the single largest class in the Warfighting from the Sea course was Military Operations Other Than War, which comprised 116.25 hours.

Military Operations Other Than War provided an extensive overview of the topic of irregular warfare, illustrated by case studies. The college acknowledged the immensely broad and varied nature of the class topic. The 1999–2000 course syllabus was typical. Drawing on *Joint Publication 3-07, Military Operations Other Than War*, the course identified no less than 16 potential MOOTW missions. Along with counterinsurgency, the missions also included supporting insurgencies, arms control, counterterrorism, counterdrug operations, enforcing sanctions, supporting civilian authorities, peace operations, and strikes and raids.⁶³ The syllabus acknowledged the course’s problematic title. In defining what counterdrug operations had to do with disaster relief and counterinsurgency, the syllabus read

The most simple response is that what these missions have in common is that they are *not war*. This is an intellectually and operationally unsatisfying answer. To say that Operation SILVER BAYONET in the Ia Drang valley, November 1965, was not war would come as a surprise to



Photo by SSgt Frank Date

In the years between the 11 September attacks in 2001 and the start of the Iraq War in 2003, the Marine Corps Command and Staff College's curriculum focused primarily on instruction in large-scale, conventional amphibious assault operations. This scene from Operation Chromite (the 1950 landing at Inchon during the Korean War) was a subject of study.

the members of the Army's First Cavalry Division. Likewise, a Russian soldier might wonder, if the conflict in Chechnya was not a war, how was the city of Grozny flattened, and why are all of his friends dead?⁶⁴

MOOTW missions, the course pointed out, often required the same level of force and combat just as intense as regular warfare missions.

The course concluded that the primary distinction between war and military operations other than war was the "overriding dominance of political factors in determining the nature of the crisis and the form and magnitude of the response."⁶⁵ The definition, again paraphrased from *Joint Publication 3-07, Military Operations Other Than War*, stressed that the overriding influence

of political elements made MOOTW unique and distinct from regular warfare. "In MOOTW, politics is a factor from the White House to the foxhole." Its emphasis on political factors was also an echo of older studies on irregular war, such as the *Small Wars Manual* and David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*.

The Military Operations Other Than War course had a number of goals. These ranged from defining the concept, assessing potential operations due to ethnic and religious conflicts, and considering the Marine Corps' small wars heritage and whether it had an impact on future MOOTW operations. The course also explored the applicability of maneuver warfare doctrine and theory to irregular warfare.⁶⁶ To examine these issues, the course focused on a number of cases studies, such as the Russians' 1994–96

campaign in Chechnya, insurgency and counterinsurgency in Vietnam, British operations in Northern Ireland, and peacekeeping operations in the Balkans and in Haiti.⁶⁷ Course readings were drawn from many of the classic works on small wars and counterinsurgencies. The 1999–2000 syllabus included T. E. Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and Andrew Krepinevich’s *The Army in Vietnam*. Other readings included Gerard Chaliand’s edited volume *Guerrilla Strategies, Low-Intensity Conflict: Old Threats in a New World*, and an article by Marine Corps General Anthony C. Zinni, “Non-Traditional Military Missions: Their Nature, and the Need for Cultural Awareness and Flexible Thinking.”⁶⁸

The class also contained a section entitled “Lieutenant General Zinni’s ‘Twenty Points for MOOTW.’” While Zinni’s observations addressed the challenges and requirements of irregular warfare as a whole, several anticipated the tactics and techniques utilized by the Marine Corps in Iraq between 2004 and 2008. For example, point 11 declared, “Don’t make enemies (But if you do, don’t treat them gently).”⁶⁹ A variation of this recommendation would emerge from the 1st Marine Division in 2003 in Iraq as “No better friend, no worse enemy.” Other points included “Know the culture (who makes decisions? what is the social structure? where is the power and how is it applied?)”; “Start or restart a key institution ASAP. Normally, it is the police force, or other security force”; “Gain and maintain the initiative/momentum”; and “Create innovative, nontraditional methods.”⁷⁰

The course saw counterinsurgency as just one of a number of different missions underneath the MOOTW umbrella. The class on Vietnam underlined the point and viewed counterinsurgency as a product of the 1960s:

For the military of the 1960s, Counterinsurgency was the MOOTW of the times. Counterinsurgency doctrine was formulated in response to the Wars of National

Liberation doctrine of the Soviet Union, first formulated by Nikita Khrushchev, as a means of exploiting the decolonization movement of the 1950s and the 1960s to bring more countries into the socialist fold. It may also be seen as a product of the “trendiness” of the Kennedy Administration.⁷¹

Thus, Marines at the Command and Staff College were taught that counterinsurgency was anchored to the political and diplomatic world of the early 1960s and the Cold War. Nevertheless, the class did not argue that counterinsurgency was an irrelevant topic of study. Instead, it sought to argue that, while the term “counterinsurgency” was linked to the Kennedy administration, the actual type of warfare had been a part of the Marine Corps’ heritage for decades. “From 1915 to 1934, the Marines were intermittently deployed to Haiti during the Banana Wars. Marine Corps legends like Smedley Butler (“Old Gimlet Eye”) and Lewis (“Chesty”) Puller commanded what today would be considered counterinsurgency and peace enforcement operations.”⁷²

The 2000–1 MOOTW class syllabus focused more on studying counterinsurgency campaigns and included readings from the *Small Wars Manual*, C. E. Callwell’s *Small Wars*, Robert Thompson’s *Defeating Communist Insurgency* on Malaya, Roger Trinquier’s *Modern Warfare* on Algeria, and Francis “Bing” West’s *The Village* on Vietnam.⁷³

The course dropped the case study of Chechnya and focused on the insurgencies in Malaya and Algeria, as well as counterinsurgency in Somalia, Colombia, and East Timor.⁷⁴ Students also watched Gillo Pontecorvo’s film *The Battle of Algiers*. Notably, soldiers and scholars would closely examine both the Malayan insurgency and Algerian war as the U.S. military considered new strategies and tactics for defeating the Iraq insurgency.⁷⁵

A common question addressed by the Military Operations Other Than War class was whether small wars and insurgencies were unique



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo
Capt Francis J. "Bing" West presents a copy of his History Division monograph, Small Unit Action in Vietnam: Summer 1966, to the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen Wallace M. Greene Jr., in 1967. Books by West, such as The Village, were frequently required reading for students at the Command and Staff College and The Basic School.

and distinct from conventional combat. In both 1999 and 2000, the syllabus devoted sessions to studying theorists of small wars and acknowledged that both Carl von Clausewitz's and Antoine-Henri Jomini's observations on warfare were relevant to understanding small wars and other military operations other than war. The 2000–1 syllabus devoted a full class to comparing and analyzing Clausewitz, Jomini, and Callwell and their overall theories of irregular warfare. The syllabus noted, "What is today termed 'peacekeeping' involves many of the same issues first raised in print by Clausewitz: the problems posed by 'the people in arms' and the inability of armed forces to bring about rapid results when faced with 'wars in the interior.'"⁷⁶ Thus, while the course drew a distinction between conventional and unconventional warfare, it also aimed to avoid bifurcating war as a whole, stressing that theorists of regular warfare were just as relevant to understanding irregular wars, peacekeeping, and insurgencies.

The 11 September attacks did not spark any substantial changes to the MOOTW class. How-

ever, the 2001–2 syllabus stressed that the Global War on Terrorism made the lessons of military operations other than war even more relevant. "Since September 11th, 2001, however, the U.S. has had to think about how to employ its undoubted 'superpower' attributes against enemies both ruthless and determined."⁷⁷ The course outline also included cautionary words about the operations in Afghanistan: "By all indications, American high-tech weaponry has performed with great success, and American forces have enjoyed considerable if incomplete success against their foes. Their ultimate outcome, however, cannot be so easy. The evidence of those post-1945 struggles studied in this course suggests that both resolution and perseverance will be sorely tried."⁷⁸ The 2003–4 class, taught while the Iraq insurgency was erupting, included similar words of caution as events seemed to confirm the concerns expressed two years earlier. "Operation Enduring Freedom, executed with astonishing speed in 2001–2, now appeared to be an enduring mission of its own. The same situation had already developed in Iraq."⁷⁹ As with the previous years, the classes continued to study theories of small wars developed by Clausewitz, Jomini, Callwell, and the *Small Wars Manual*, and examine case studies of irregular warfare in Malaya, Algeria, Vietnam, Northern Ireland, and Somalia.⁸⁰

Military Operations Other Than War was not the only class on unconventional warfare taught at the Command and Staff College. The college also offered a range of electives on the topic. In the 1999–2000 academic year, one of the electives focused on Latin American insurgencies. The course included sessions examining Castro's rebellion in Cuba; the civil wars in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala; and the criminal insurgencies in Colombia.⁸¹ In 2001–2, the Operational Level of War course featured a class on Soviet counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan.⁸² In 2002–3, the Command and Staff College's electives included courses on Callwell and Victorian small wars as well as a course



Official Department of Defense photo

U.S. Marines attack a possible enemy hideout in Haiti in 1918 or 1919. An important characteristic of Marine education in counterinsurgency was to emphasize that, although they were called “small” wars or “military operations other than war,” conflicts against irregular forces still required basic warfighting skills.

entitled *The American Indian Wars: Neglected Part of the American Military Tradition?*⁸³ The latter course, taught by Donald Bittner, explored the long history of war between North America’s indigenous population and European settlers and their descendents. The class considered whether the wars between the United States and Indians constituted a part or an exception to the American military tradition.⁸⁴ As with the course on MOOTW, the class sought to address whether small wars and irregular warfare as a whole was part of the “American Way of War.” The 2003–4 academic year offered the same electives.

While the subject went by a variety of names (a point highlighted by the fact that 16 missions were placed under the umbrella term military operations other than war), the Command and Staff College did not neglect the topic of small wars and irregular warfare. It was taught in electives and was a distinct section of the college’s Warfighting from the Sea sequence of classes offered

during the first semester. However, although the MOOTW classes’ 120 hours accounted for the most credit hours of all the warfighting classes (about 20–22 percent), it accounted for just about 7–8 percent of the Command and Staff College’s total hours of instruction.⁸⁵ The overall thrust and emphasis of the curriculum was on amphibious assaults along the scale of Operation Husky and Operation Chromite, expeditionary missions, Marine air-ground task force operations, and the operational level of war.

While the focus of the Command and Staff College’s syllabus during the beginning of the 2000s was on mastering conventional operations, it nevertheless provided important instruction in irregular warfare. A number of themes would shape these courses throughout the decade. First, teaching students to treat the term counterinsurgency in a broad and flexible manner. Although the term was normally utilized to describe a range of specific conflicts, mostly anticolonial and Marx-

ist wars of liberations, the Command and Staff College's instructors nevertheless taught students that the Banana Wars of the 1920s and the security and peacekeeping operations during the 1990s were variants of counterinsurgencies. The definition of MOOTW as any kind of military operations in which political considerations overwhelmingly influenced the nature of the conflict and defined success or failure was also one that could be traced back to the *Small Wars Manual* definition of small wars and Roger Trinquier and David Galula's definition of counterinsurgency. Perhaps the overriding and most persistent theme of small wars instruction for the Marine Corps was that it was nothing new. Small wars, counterinsurgencies, and irregular wars were an integral part of the Marine Corps heritage. Thus, while the college's course of instruction focused on the Marine Corps' role as an expeditionary and amphibious force-in-readiness, small wars were nevertheless a part of the Corps' history and mission.

Conclusion

The Marine Corps that went to war in 2001 was very much the Marine Corps of the post-Cold War era. Throughout the 1990s, the Corps had joined the Navy in planning to fight potential short-term contingency operations. These plans, which envisioned crises emerging throughout the world's unstable coastal regions, drew upon a range of concepts that had been developing within the Marine Corps since the Vietnam War: maneuver warfare, the maritime proposition-

ing force, sea-based operations, and operational maneuver from the sea. By the end of the 1990s, these ideas had been collected and synthesized as expeditionary maneuver warfare, a warfighting concept that emphasized the versatile capabilities of the Marine Corps' air-ground task forces. Marine Corps leaders stressed the Corps' ability to conduct humanitarian operations and fight both irregular and conventional threats.

Operation Enduring Freedom did little to change this mind-set within the Corps. The airlift of the 1st MEB from amphibious assault ships in the Arabian Sea more than three miles into Afghanistan in November 2001 demonstrated that Marine units could rapidly deploy over difficult terrain. The operation attested to the newfound influence maneuver warfare now had within the Marine Corps. At the same time, however, the opening months of Operation Enduring Freedom presented troubling portents for Marines who envisioned the Corps taking an active role in the Global War on Terrorism. As remarkable and dramatic as Task Force 58's operations had been, U.S. Special Operations Forces teams attached to local Afghan rebel forces had been the principal cause for the collapse of the Taliban regime in Kabul. In the mind-set of many, the Marine Corps' versatility made it ideal for the type of war emerging against al-Qaeda. Yet, the apparent success of special forces led some Marines to predict that this branch of the military would become the United States' primary combatant force during the Global War on Terrorism.

Chapter 3

The Iraq War

The airlift of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade (1st MEB) into Afghanistan during the opening months of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001 represented a confirmation of the concept of maneuver warfare for many Marines. The distance alone, more than 300 nautical miles into a landlocked country, demonstrated that Marine Corps units could be staged at a sea-based position and operate far from the coast. The insertion confirmed that the Marine Corps was capable of fulfilling its mission of serving as an expeditionary force-in-readiness. However, some observers, notably those assigned to the Operation Enduring Freedom Combat Assessment Team, questioned whether the concept had been tested as fully as it could have been. While the 1st MEB had successfully executed its maneuver, it had faced little opposition on the battlefield, leading some to wonder how the brigade's two Marine expeditionary units would have overcome the friction of combat. The prominent and ultimately decisive role played by special operations forces teams in overthrowing the Taliban also led some Marines to wonder what role they would play on a battlefield dominated by special forces units utilizing air-delivered, precision-guided munitions.

Less than two years after the fall of the Taliban regime, however, the Marine Corps would face a new threat in Iraq. This conflict, beginning in 2003, would fully test the Marine Corps' ability to serve as a flexible and adaptable combat force. As General Charles C. Krulak predicted, Marine Corps units would be tasked with concurrently conducting multiple types of operations, ranging from full-fledged conventional battle to humanitarian assistance. Most importantly, the Iraq War



Photo by LCpl Andrew Z. Williams
LtGen James T. Conway speaks during a relief-in-place ceremony in Iraq in 2003. Conway's I Marine Expeditionary Force was the principal Marine command during the first phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

would prompt a renewed and more focused interest on the subject of counterinsurgency as a specific type of warfare. Without abandoning its primary function as a general-purpose force, the Marine Corps would embrace the study of counterinsurgency throughout the decade.

***Operation Iraqi Freedom I (2003):
Maneuver Warfare Is Once Again Put to the Test***

The first three years of the Global War on Terrorism saw two significant events that demonstrated that the Marine Corps had fully embraced the principles of maneuver warfare. The first of these was the more than 300-mile airlift of the 15th MEU (SOC) into Afghanistan and the seizure of Forward Operating Base Rhino. The second was the dramatic, 300 mile-long drive from the Kuwaiti border to Baghdad in March 2003. In a matter of weeks, I MEF, commanded by Lieutenant General James T. Conway, was able to maintain the same speed of advance as the Army's V Corps, commanded by Lieutenant General William S. Wallace. I MEF's organic ground combat element, 1st Marine Division under the command of Major General James N. Mattis, would ultimately advance deeper than V Corps into Iraq, from the Kuwaiti border in the south to the city of Tikrit, more than 80 miles to the north of Baghdad.¹ In all, more than 20,000 Marines and 5,000 vehicles would cross the Iraqi desert, constituting one of the longest land campaigns in the history of the Corps.²

The operational plan, described as "the first major test of the maneuver warfare doctrine,"³ demonstrated that the mechanized, highly mobile Marine Corps envisioned by many during the 1970s had become a reality. The campaign also revealed how much the Army and Marine Corps had converged in terms of capabilities and their overall doctrines of maneuver.⁴ The "march up"⁵ from Kuwait to Baghdad was defined by speed. For the operation, I MEF was designed to travel as lightly and as rapidly as possible. The 1st Marine Division would "fight lean," utilizing

only the barest minimum of logistical support. Vehicles were even equipped with external fuel tanks to increase range to optimum level.⁶ All three of the 1st Marine Division's regiments were reinforced with light armored reconnaissance battalions equipped with LAV-25 light armored vehicles. Two of these regiments, Regimental Combat Teams 5 and 7, also included a tank battalion each.⁷ The attached 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade (Task Force Tarawa) was also reinforced with companies of light armored vehicles and tanks. The advance was demanding, with 1st Marine Division's subordinate commanders under constant pressure from its headquarters to maintain a constant forward advance.⁸ On 4 April 2003, for example, Major General Mattis relieved Colonel Joseph D. Dowdy of command of Regimental Combat Team 1 largely due to the sense that his regiment was slowing down the advance of the rest of the division.⁹

The initial invasion of Iraq bore the hallmarks of a large-scale conventional military operation against an organized national army. Yet, within a matter days, it became apparent that operations in Iraq would require a range of skills and tactics more in line with those entailed within military operations other-than-war. During the battle of an-Nasiriyah fought between 23 March and 2 April 2003, Task Force Tarawa encountered fierce resistance from irregular militia forces known as *fedayeen*. These enemy forces utilized "hospitals, mosques, and schools as arms caches and defensive positions" as they battled Marines and sought to disrupt and hinder I MEF's northward advance.¹⁰ The *fedayeen*'s tactics were largely inspired by those utilized in Somalia against U.S. forces in 1993, including blending in with the civilian population, utilizing rocket-propelled grenades, and using suicide attacks to slow down the U.S. advance and inflict the maximum number of casualties.¹¹ As the U.S. forces advanced northward, regular Iraqi soldiers also began to melt into the population to give themselves an advantage.¹² The *fedayeen* also had

a transnational element, with fighters coming to Iraq from across the Middle East to participate in martyrdom missions against American forces.¹³ All of these characteristics would define the insurgency launched against the U.S. occupation in the months after the fall of Saddam's regime. However, while the tactics were similar, the fedayeen proved to be inconsequential to the ultimate outcome of the war.¹⁴ The end of the initial phase of the conflict occurred within a matter of weeks, as Marine Corps and Army units entered Baghdad beginning on 7 April 2003.

With the collapse of the Baath regime came a range of new challenges and tasks as the United States found itself increasingly responsible for the occupation and administration of the Iraqi state. During the days immediately following the collapse of the Baath regime, it did not appear that the coming months would be marked by further hostilities or violence, and both Marines and soldiers began to implement security and stability operations (also known as Phase IV operations). The Bush administration was reluctant to engage in nation building and initially hoped to implement a quick and rapid transfer of authority to the Iraqis.¹⁵ Consequently, there had been little planning for postwar operations, with one senior Marine declaring there was "absolutely no plan for Phase IV."¹⁶

This was not entirely the case. In January 2003, for example, the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory conducted a war game examining how Marines dealt with civilian populations, analyzing the Combined Action Program in Vietnam, operations in Somalia, and the recent operation in Afghanistan, with the intent of preparing Marines to deal with the population of a post-Saddam Iraq. Among the participants were former Combined Action Program Marines.¹⁷ Following the war game, the Marine Corps' Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities produced a report detailing what commanders would need to consider as they developed tactics and training exercises for dealing with the Iraqi



Photo by GySgt Matthew M. Smith
Two of the more influential Marine commanders in Iraq in 2003 were 1st Marine Division commander Gen James N. Mattis (right) and 5th Marines commanding officer Col Joseph F. Dunford Jr.

population.¹⁸ Anticipating postwar challenges, several I MEF staff members devised preliminary security and stability plans in the event of the Baath regime's collapse, assuming the worst possible scenario.¹⁹ As the fall of Saddam Hussein's government gave way to mass looting and general disorder in the streets of Iraq's cities, it rapidly became apparent that Marines would need to conduct stability operations to reassert order in their areas of responsibility.

Even at this early stage in the Iraq War, the Marines of I MEF implemented a range of procedures that would become common practice during its operations throughout the insurgency phase of the war. The 11th Marines, the 1st Marine Division's artillery regiment, was tasked with conducting foot patrols and operating the division's Civil-Military Operations Center.²⁰ During future deployments to Iraq, Marine artillery units would be given similar civil affairs and security missions, and often found themselves "leaving the tubes at home."²¹ The Civil-Military Operations Center helped lay the groundwork for rebuilding

basic infrastructure and services in Baghdad, including appointing an interim police chief, opening a police academy, and enlisting the help of electrical engineers to reestablish the power grid.²² For Brigadier General John F. Kelly, 1st Marine Division's assistant division commander, the operations, which entailed providing basic security and humanitarian assistance, were akin to disaster relief.²³

On 11 April, General Mattis placed Brigadier General Kelly in command of Task Force Tripoli, a task-organized force that combined I MEF's three light armored reconnaissance battalions (1st, 2d, and 3d LAR Battalions) into a single mechanized unit, and sent it northwest from Baghdad to secure the city of Tikrit. Within days, the city was cleared of enemy forces, though looting and general lawlessness remained. Once again, Kelly saw the need to establish basic security and saw a solution to the problem when local tribal sheikhs approached the Marine checkpoint in order to establish a tribal leadership council.²⁴

The tribes of Iraq, especially those in its western regions, would play a critical role in defeating the Iraq insurgency between 2006 and 2007. As a result, it is important to have an understanding of the role tribes have played in Iraq and its development as a state. Tribes have been a part of the Mesopotamian society for centuries. Along with the organization of much of the region's rural population into tribes, clans, households, houses, and families, tribalism also left a legacy of concern for family, honor, and a loyalty to particular tribal groups that made cooperation beyond kinship groups difficult.²⁵ The development of Iraq as a state was thus often shaped by the tensions between a centralizing government and a rival source of authority in the form of alliances built on kinship and tribal affiliation. During the Ottoman Empire, alliances between the central government and the tribal elites helped lay the foundation for governance in the provinces along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Under the British Mandate (established in 1920) and the subsequent Hashemite Kingdom (1932–58), the tribes were given considerable autonomy from the central Iraqi state.²⁶ Following the overthrow of the Hashemites in 1958 and the establishment of the Iraqi Republic, tribal power in Iraq declined as the Baath party sought to centralize its authority and modernize the state by abolishing old traditional prerogatives and weakening rival sources of authority.²⁷ Indeed, the Baath party often asserted that tribalism was a vestige of Iraq's colonial past.²⁸ Nevertheless, the Baath party often found itself forced to rely on the support of Iraq's tribes, especially during the 1980s and 1990s when Saddam Hussein's policies led to increasing threats to his regime from both outside (Iran, the U.S.-led Coalition in 1990–91) and within (the Shia uprising of 1991).²⁹ Of particular importance was the large Dulaimi Confederation of tribes located in Iraq's vast western al-Anbar Province, a confederation that would play a crucial role in Marine Corps and Army counterinsurgency efforts over the course of Operation Iraqi Freedom. By the late 1990s, Iraq's tribes had become an integral part of the state's security apparatus, a testament to the gradual decline of Iraq's central government in the face of sanctions and constant military pressure.³⁰ The tribes also took advantage of the economic disruption caused by the United Nations' sanctions against Iraq, participating in a range of extra-legal activities such as smuggling, extortion, and hijacking.

General Kelly and Task Force Tripoli's staff greeted the overtures from Tikrit's sheikhs with some trepidation due to their history and place within Saddam Hussein's governing apparatus. Not only had many of the sheikhs been involved in the Baath regime, but they also represented an antimodern, antidemocratic, and hereditary form of authority that conflicted with the goal of creating a stable, liberal, democratic state in Iraq.³¹ Nevertheless, faced with the need to reestablish order and security as quickly as possible,



Photo by LCpl Nicholas Radloff

Marines of Task Force Tripoli in Tikrit, north of Baghdad, in April 2003. As they transferred authority over the city to the U.S. Army's 4th Infantry Division that month, many Marines were struck by the differing approaches to security and stability operations of the two Services.

Kelly agreed to the creation of an interim council managed by the sheikhs for the purpose of restoring basic services to the city.³²

Throughout April, Task Force Tripoli confronted both the problems and benefits of empowering Tikrit's tribal groups. Vigilante organizations remained active, as did tensions between Arabs and Kurds. Nevertheless, General Kelly undertook considerable effort to build a working relationship with the sheikhs, in particular Fahren al-Sudaïd, with whom Kelly traveled to the city of Baiji in order to assist him in establishing a governing council and police chief.³³ Back in Tikrit, Task Force Tripoli continued to rebuild the region's infrastructure, purifying water and working to rebuild power lines and grids. Its operations in the city were of relatively short duration, and between 19–21 April, the task

force was relieved by elements of the U.S. Army's 4th Infantry Division under the command of Major General Raymond T. Odierno.

The transfer of authority over Tikrit from Task Force Tripoli to the 4th Infantry Division has sparked some debate, largely due to the contrast between the Marine Corps and Army approaches to security and stability operations in Iraq.³⁴ The Marine Corps' occasional paper, *With the 1st Marine Division in Iraq, 2003*, which draws on the division's command chronologies, is critical of the 4th Infantry Division, writing that "the dichotomy between the two peacekeeping strategies was unsettling for the Marines."³⁵ The account also criticizes the Army division for failing to follow up on Task Force Tripoli's efforts to forge a working relationship with tribal leaders and Tikrit's citizens, and for preferring a more



Photo by Sgt Kevin R. Reed

The 1st Marine Division's advance into Iraq in 2003 was marked by high speed and mobility. In all, more than 20,000 Marines and 5,000 vehicles would cross the Iraqi desert, constituting one of the longest land campaigns in the history of the Corps.

aggressive approach. The 4th Infantry Division's failure to capitalize on these efforts helped to create an adversarial relationship between the Iraqi people and U.S. forces. Overall, the 4th Infantry Division has been criticized for its "heavy-handed tactics"³⁶ and overreliance on artillery in operations throughout northern Iraq.

In the opinion of the 4th Infantry Division, however, the situation in Tikrit was not as stable as the Marines claimed. Lieutenant Colonel Gian P. Gentile, the executive officer of the 1st Brigade Combat Team of the 4th Infantry Division, noted, "The velvet glove applied by the Marines in Tikrit covered up some dangerous problems and conditions."³⁷ These conditions included continued mass looting and other forms of lawlessness. The dichotomy was likely a consequence of different perceptions regarding what type of mission needed to be performed. General Kelly's outlook was that major combat operations had come to a close and postwar security operations were required. General Odierno and his division, in con-

trast, believed that such operations were premature. The region north of Baghdad around Tikrit, Samarra, and Baqubah had seen little combat during the initial phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Consequently, Baathist networks remained active and continued to attack American forces throughout the summer of 2003.³⁸

Significant contrasts nevertheless remained between how the Marine Corps and Army related to the Iraqi population. While debate regarding which approach worked best will continue for some time, one important fact remains that is pertinent to this history: the rivalry between the Army and Marine Corps spurred innovation on the part of the Corps as it frequently devised counterinsurgency and stability operation tactics distinct from those utilized by the Army. The use of mounted and dismounted patrols is one example. On 17 April 2003, General Mattis remarked on the distinctions between the two services in his intentions message on the transfer of authority to the U.S. Army V Corps:

A critical lesson emerging in our hand-off with V Corps is the mission essential requirement for dismounted infantry in civil-military ops. As we hand off our portion of Baghdad as well as the city of Tikrit, the lack of Army dismounts is creating a void in personal contact and public perception of our civil-military ops. Our forces need to project confidence in the security environment we have created. That is best exemplified in light, mobile force in armored vehicles. If we cannot engender friendship and confidence in the local security environment, we cannot set the conditions for good order integral to return civil control.³⁹

The use of dismounted patrols would be a significant hallmark of the Marine Corps' approach to security operations and counterinsurgency. Thus, the Marine Corps' nature as a service built around dismounted riflemen became an asset in Iraq.⁴⁰

As the 1st Marine Division transferred from Baghdad to occupation duties in southern Iraq during the summer of 2003, Mattis reinforced this point by ordering the division's armored personnel carriers, tanks, and artillery to be sent back to Kuwait "to prevent his Marines from using heavy firepower that might unnecessarily arouse the locals."⁴¹ The foot patrols also allowed the Iraqis to put a human face on the U.S. forces. As one Marine lieutenant recalled, "We did a lot of patrols . . . actually we did *a lot* of patrols, day and night, working the city."⁴² Marines acknowledged that such patrols were dangerous. "You're putting yourself out in the open—just walking down the middle of the street." Nevertheless, it forced Marines and Iraqis to interact in a way that would have been impossible if the Marines relied only on armored vehicles. The sacrifice in security brought with it a less menacing and intimidating presence.⁴³ The fact that all Marines were trained to be proficient marksman ("Every Marine a Rifleman") also increased the

numbers of Marines capable of participating in patrols and security operations. A lessons learned brief on Operation Iraqi Freedom emphasized this point, recommending that combat training should remain a requirement for all noninfantry Marines.⁴⁴

During the summer of 2003, I MEF was tasked with the administration of nine provinces in Iraq's south. The 1st Marine Division was responsible for seven of these.⁴⁵ General Mattis' approach to security operations was to balance a light footprint with persistent personal contact between Marines and Iraqis. Along with the division's tanks and assault vehicles, Mattis also sent about 15,000 Marines home, leaving about 8,000 in Iraq.⁴⁶ Seven battalions remained (one for each province) along with two light armored reconnaissance battalions.⁴⁷ The aviation component of I MEF, the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing (commanded by Major General James F. Amos) also returned to the United States, leaving behind two helicopter detachments.⁴⁸ The region was densely populated, accounting for more than 10 million individuals, roughly equating to one Marine for every 1,200 Iraqis.⁴⁹ It was an exceptionally small number, especially considering the area of responsibility amounted to roughly half the country's population. However, by maintaining a light footprint, Mattis hoped to prevent the impression of an oppressive occupation and ensure that people did not see a Marine everywhere they looked. Furthermore, he and others hoped to enlist the aid of Iraqis for security and administrative purposes.⁵⁰

The battalion commanders were given responsibility for security, rebuilding infrastructure, and restarting basic services. They worked closely with the Iraqis, having tea with local leaders and building a rapport that gave them considerable knowledge and understanding of the culture and society of their area of responsibility.⁵¹ Total authority over the administration and security in each province rested entirely with the battalion commander, so much so that

the Marines' zone of responsibility was dubbed "The Blue Diamond Republic."⁵² In the words of General Kelly, "They were, from commanders to squad leaders on patrol, in essence benevolent dictators with the wisdom of Solomon required to cut through the maze of competing agendas and emotions that dominate Iraqi society."⁵³ In al-Muthanna Province's capital, as-Samawah, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, under Lieutenant Colonel Daniel J. O'Donohue, successfully directed and supervised the recreation of a local city council with the cooperation of the city's tribal leaders. In an-Najaf, the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Christopher C. Conlin, arrested, removed, and replaced the city's unpopular and corrupt mayor.⁵⁴ In Karbala, the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines' commander, Lieutenant Colonel Michael F. Belcher, helped organize city council elections and even participated in the selection of council members to particular posts.⁵⁵ Creating a working police force that could provide security in a just and ethical manner was deemed a priority, and throughout the Marines' zone of responsibility they opened new academies and patrolled alongside Iraqi policemen in order to put "an Iraqi face" on security.⁵⁶

General Mattis ordered Marines to remove their sunglasses when speaking to Iraqis, so that they could look each other in the eye.⁵⁷ Chaplains provided Marines with cultural sensitivity training, helping them to understand the importance of religion and religious institutions in Iraq.⁵⁸ Understudy officers were also assigned by division headquarters to the battalions to provide commanders and staffs with information on "intelligence trends, local gossip, clerical proclamations (*fatwah*), and events on the street."⁵⁹ The approach was well summarized by General Kelly, who explained that in the absence of doctrine, the goal was to reestablish a working society by pointing out the parallels between Iraqi and American culture as a means of guidance. In Western countries, Kelly noted, individuals wanted to be left alone and were anxious around armed men in uniform,

especially at holy sites. Iraq was no different.⁶⁰ Mattis synthesized his guidance for the postwar administration into three basic goals: win hearts and minds, ensure that Marines would always win "the 10-second gunfight," and "do no harm." "If someone needs shooting, shoot him. If someone does not need shooting, protect him."⁶¹

The Marine Corps was able to make the mental transition from combat to postwar operations with little difficulty, a fact commended later by I MEF commander General Conway.⁶² It did so without substantial preparation or planning beforehand, nor specific doctrinal guidance for security and stability operations. The sudden need to administer Iraq came as a surprise to many Marines in the field. General Kelly remarked that summer that he assumed nongovernment organizations would be putting the country back together and that United Nations forces would be providing security. "No one expected that we would have to put down the rifle and immediately turn around and start rebuilding a nation."⁶³ One platoon commander recalled about the operations, "It was kind of painful actually—because that's not what we're traditionally trained to do. But we started to make some progress with it."⁶⁴ The commander of the 5th Marines and later chief of staff of the 1st Marine Division, Colonel Joseph F. Dunford Jr., concurred, noting in August 2003 that he had not anticipated such heavy involvement in Phase IV operations on the part of the division.⁶⁵ Deputy commanding general of I MEF, Major General Keith J. Stalder noted some surprise as well, but again acknowledged the Marines' ability to adapt. "Our general prediction at the time was that the basic services for the Iraqi people would be the main effort in the campaign ahead, and we were absolutely right about that. I won't say I was surprised, but it was pretty murky when you looked at it."⁶⁶ The 1st Marine Division's operations officer, Lieutenant Colonel Norman L. Cooling, noted at the same time that much more time had been spent on security and stability operations than anticipated and that the plans for Phase IV



Photo by SSgt Bryan P. Reed

Marines from the 24th MEU establish a perimeter in Qalat Sukkar, Iraq, in 2003. Ensuring that Marines maintained close and visible contact with Iraqi civilians was a critical element of the 1st Marine Division's security and stability operations during the summer of 2003.

operations conducted before the invasion had been premised on incorrect assumptions about the state of Iraq following the war.⁶⁷

Marines looked to a variety of precedents and historical examples as they set about conducting security operations. Colonel Dunford noted the importance of the *Small Wars Manual*, describing it as the “primary” doctrinal publication for the Marines in Iraq.⁶⁸ Lieutenant Colonel Cooling agreed, though also noted that while the manual contained broad, universally applicable principles, it naturally lacked guidance regarding the specific cultural environment and circumstances for Iraq.⁶⁹ Division staff members did consult with members of the British armed forces deployed in Iraq, in particular about their own experiences in Northern Ireland.⁷⁰ Perhaps most important, however, was the tone set by General

Mattis, who laid down a clear conception of how he wished to conduct security operations to his division commanders. A rigorous lessons learned program was also instituted, with Mattis meeting with his commanders every 10 days to review which tactics and procedures were working and which were not.⁷¹

While I MEF achieved a considerable number of successes during the summer of 2003, the period was also marked by setbacks and difficulties. Some were a consequence of deficiencies within the expeditionary force and division, most notably the lack of translators.⁷² Before Operation Iraqi Freedom began, I MEF estimated it would need 253 Arabic linguists. The Marine Corps could only provide 155 toward this requirement and of these only 45 were actually deployed to the theater.⁷³ Thus, the expeditionary force had



Photo by LCpl Gordon A. Rouse

A Marine Corps High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle races to aid Marines fighting in an-Nasiriyah during the “march up” to Baghdad in April 2003. At an-Nasiriyah, Marines first encountered irregular fedayeen fighters who utilized many of the same tactics that insurgents would use during the subsequent insurgency.

less than a quarter of the linguists required for its operations in Iraq. A Reserve Combat Assessment Team analyzing lessons learned from reserve forces in Operation Iraqi Freedom observed that “the MEF desperately needed translators during all phases of the conflict but especially during the Phase IV stabilization operations. The translators that the MEF did have were ‘worth their weight in gold,’ as one senior officer put it.”⁷⁴ During the fall of 2003, *Marine Corps Gazette* would publish an article addressing the issue written by Arabic linguist Major Clint J. Nussberger, who concluded that “our national strategy of engagement requires that the Marine Corps retain a qualified pool of operational linguists.”⁷⁵ Nussberger recommended a more rigorous process of identifying potential linguists within the Corps’ ranks as well as the continued use of Marine Expeditionary Force Command language programs.

Broader problems beyond the control of the Marine Corps units also existed, most notably the declining situation in Iraq within months of the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime and the inability of the newly constituted Coalition Provisional Authority to support the reconstruction efforts being undertaken by U.S. forces in the field. The constant struggle to rebuild the nation’s power grid was one example, as the state’s infrastructure had been in a state of decline even before the war.⁷⁶ Senior policemen were often corrupt, used to the practices of the Baath regime, and frequently unwilling to change their ways.⁷⁷ When Lieutenant Colonel Conlin organized elections to replace the mayor of an-Najaf, it was initially supported by the Coalition Provisional Authority under L. Paul Bremer. However, shortly before the process was to begin, the authority ordered General Mattis to cancel the election out of fear that “an unfriendly



Photo by Cpl Mace M. Gratz

Enemy prisoners of war and suspected fedayeen irregulars captured by Marines during fighting north of an-Nasiriyah in 2003.

Islamic candidate would prevail.”⁷⁸ Instead, Conlin was asked by the authority to select a group of Iraqis considered safe and allow them to select a new mayor. Bremer’s decision to disband the Iraqi Army also stalled reconstruction efforts, especially since General Mattis’ decision to redeploy the bulk of his division home had been predicated on the assumption that Iraqis would be able to participate in security operations. As Mattis recalled, “Two things then created major problems: disbanding the Iraqi Army and putting proud soldiers on the street unemployed. The other was shortstopping local elections.”⁷⁹

A number of characteristics would emerge from the Marine Corps’ stability operations that would continue to shape its approach to combatting the Iraq insurgency when Marines returned to Iraq in 2004. The first was an emphasis on dismounted patrolling and engaging the populace

to put a human face on the American presence in Iraq. Related to this was the frequent utilization of all Marines for security duty. The concept that every Marine was a rifleman was confirmed by the frequent reliance on Marines from artillery battalions and logistics and combat service support units to perform security and civil affairs operations. The second was to seek out the sources of power and authority within local communities and forge cooperative arrangements with them. Thus, for example, although Task Force Tripoli expressed reluctance about empowering traditional tribal sheikhs, its members nevertheless understood that ignoring them and attempting to circumvent them would ultimately prove counterproductive. Third, the Marines focused on building police forces and trying to ensure that Iraqis, and not Marines, be responsible for security patrols.

The Marines would continue to utilize these basic approaches when they returned to Iraq in 2004. However, as will be seen, the situation in that country quickly became more chaotic, lethal, and radicalized, necessitating new approaches and innovations. Thus, beginning in late 2003, Marine leaders would begin analyzing the events of the year and developing new approaches and strategies. What were once described as security and stability operations and military operations other than war were soon to be analyzed under the concepts of small wars and counterinsurgencies.

The Return to Iraq, 2004

When the commanding general of U.S. Central Command, John P. Abizaid, stated in a 13 July 2003 press conference that U.S. forces in Iraq were facing a “classical guerrilla-type campaign against us,” he confirmed what many officials and troops in Iraq already knew.⁸⁰ During the spring and summer of 2003, Iraq rapidly fell into the grips of an insurgency made up of a diverse collection of loosely organized groups with a variety of objectives. These ranged from former regime loyalists fighting for nationalist goals to foreign fundamentalist fighters whose primary aim was to build a new Islamist state. Whatever their background and goals, the U.S. forces in Iraq were their common enemy.⁸¹ As a consequence of the insurgency, the United States was forced to bolster its forces in Iraq. Almost as soon as the Marines of I MEF had returned to the United States, Commandant of the Marine Corps General Michael W. Hagee ordered Lieutenant General Conway to prepare three battalions for another deployment to Iraq.⁸² Within weeks, three battalions became two regimental combat teams, an air wing, and a force service support group, representing roughly 63 percent of the expeditionary force’s total strength.⁸³

The deployment, scheduled for the spring of 2004, would be markedly different from the one in 2003. Not only would the primary mission be security, reconstruction, and nation building,

but the Marines would also be deployed to Iraq’s al-Anbar Province. Whereas in 2003 the Marine Corps was responsible for occupying Iraq’s Shia-dominated south, now it would be responsible for a region defined by both Sunni Islam and tribal culture. While the population was considerably smaller (a little more than a million individuals, the majority of whom lived in towns and cities along the Euphrates River) than the population administered by the Marines in 2003, the total area was far greater: at 53,208 square miles, it was the largest of Iraq’s provinces, comprising about 32 percent of Iraq’s total area.⁸⁴ Thus, I MEF would be responsible for controlling the province’s nearly 500 mile-long international border with Jordan, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. As a Sunni stronghold, al-Anbar was also a center of the insurgency, especially the city of al-Fallujah, which had been as hostile to the Baathist regime as it was to the Coalition Provisional Authority that replaced it.⁸⁵ Lying along old trade and smuggling routes connecting Baghdad to the Middle Eastern states to Iraq’s west, the province was also the site of several “ratlines” as fighters from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria crossed into Iraq to participate in the insurgency.⁸⁶

To confront the new challenges of operating in al-Anbar Province in what was now an irregular war, Generals Conway, Mattis, Amos, and the subordinate commanders of I MEF set to work devising a new plan for the return to Iraq that built upon their experiences the previous summer. Critically, the same commanders who led the Marine Corps against Saddam Hussein’s forces in March and April 2003 would command I MEF when it returned the following year. Along with General Conway, all of the major I MEF commanders would return, including General Mattis (1st Marine Division), General Amos (3d Marine Aircraft Wing), and Brigadier General Richard S. Kramlich (1st Force Service Support Group). General Conway’s deputy Marine expeditionary force commander, chief of staff, and the deputy chiefs of staff for manpower and personnel, intel-



Photo by Cpl Annette Kyriades

Part of General Mattis' plan for the 1st Marine Division's second deployment to Iraq in 2004 was to introduce a version of the Vietnam War-era Combined Action Program in which Marines would train and fight alongside Iraqi security forces. In this image, members of the 11th MEU train Iraqi National Guard commandos at an-Najaf in 2004.

ligence, operations, civil affairs, and communications were all veterans of the 2003 deployment. Likewise, General Mattis' deputy and former commander of Task Force Tripoli, General Kelly, would also return in his post as 1st Marine Division's assistant division commander. Colonel Dunford, who had commanded Regimental Combat Team 5 during the march up in 2003, would return as General Mattis' chief of staff. Colonel Toolan, who had served as both General Mattis' chief of operations and a regimental commander, would also return as commanding officer of Regimental Combat Team 1. Colonel Stuart L. Knoll would return as commander of Marine Aircraft Group 16 and Colonel Ronnell R. McFarland would return as commander of Marine Air Control Group 38.⁸⁷ Personnel continuity existed beyond the expeditionary force's command structure, with many platoons and companies re-

turning with little significant personnel change. First Lieutenant Anthony C. Johnston recalled on his platoon's redeployment that "a lot of high-end leadership remained intact" and that "we had enough key players in place that went through the first time, so when the new guys showed up, there was the experience there too."⁸⁸

Through I MEF, planners devised new means for confronting the challenges emerging in Iraq. The overall focus was on creating a plan of action distinct from that being used by Army units currently in theater. General Conway likened it more to the British Army's approach in Basrah than to the Army's.⁸⁹ These efforts included renewed language and civil affairs training.⁹⁰ The division contacted Arabists, such as Barak A. Salmoni at the Naval Postgraduate School, to provide Marines with briefings about Arab and Iraqi culture and society.⁹¹ "We didn't even look at a mortar

system pretty much the whole time we were there [training] and it worked out well,” noted Lieutenant Johnston about the cultural training he received before redeploying.⁹² First Lieutenant Donovan Campbell, who commanded a platoon of the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, recounted the challenges of training his command:

So, two weeks into January we shifted much of our time and effort away from proficiency in traditional missions and toward a new goal: learning how to avoid offending the Iraqis. My Marines, 50 percent of whom probably could not have learned a major world religion, now learned the intricacies of the historical and doctrinal conflicts between Sunni and Shiite Islamic sects. We crammed Iraqi cultural nuances down their throats as fast as they could swallow them.⁹³

Among other things, Marines were instructed not to stare at Iraqi women, not to touch Iraqis with the left hand, and to avoid showing Iraqis the bottom of their shoes.⁹⁴

The 1st Marine Division also established a “rudimentary orientation” for its units using an abandoned housing site at March Air Reserve Base. The concept of creating a realistic training environment would lay the foundations for the creation of the Mojave Viper exercises at the Marine Air Ground Combat Center at Twentynine Palms (see below).⁹⁵ During the exercise, role players were used to create an environment replicating that of an Iraqi town.⁹⁶ Marines patrolled the mock-up, honing their skills at dismounted and mounted patrolling and establishing vehicle checkpoints. An elaborate range of scenarios was created to further enhance the realism of the training, with the role players given specific scripts and backgrounds. The steps in the presence patrol exercise began with the patrol leader gaining and maintaining situational awareness, drawing from intelligence and communications

from higher headquarters and situation reports. The procedures for conducting the patrol emphasized conducting reconnaissance, developing necessary security measures, providing an overwatch (sniper, marksman) element, acquiring information on persons to be apprehended, and establishing casualty evacuation procedures. During the exercise, patrol leaders ensured that each Marine demonstrated an understanding of his mission and the rules of engagement.⁹⁷

Dismounted patrolling would play an important part in the Marine Corps’ operational plans for Iraq. For example, Company G, 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, eliminated its weapons platoon and fielded a company made up of four rifle platoons, the rationale being that the use of mortars and rockets in densely populated areas could kill civilians and further alienate the population.⁹⁸ A briefing from the command chronology of the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, established a wide range of standards for effective patrolling, including the need to ensure all patrols possessed offensive capabilities, the importance of ensuring no unnecessary harm came to noncombatants, and the ability to effectively and rapidly deal with a variety of contingencies, including establishing a vehicle checkpoint, controlling a crowd, confronting civil disturbances, and apprehending suspects and arms caches.⁹⁹

Once again, Marine leaders looked to the *Small Wars Manual* to be a useful basic guide for conducting operations, and General Mattis encouraged his Marines to read it before redeploying.¹⁰⁰ Mattis also prepared a package of articles for his officers to read. These included works on current operations in Iraq as well as works on insurgencies and counterinsurgencies, such as T. E. Lawrence’s essay “Twenty-Seven Articles,” a collection of axioms and observations from his experience during the Arab Revolt of World War I as well as essays on Israel’s occupation of Lebanon.¹⁰¹ In preparing for the deployment, Mattis also studied French counterinsurgency operations in Algeria.¹⁰²



Photo by SSgt Jonathan C. Knaith

The performance of Iraqi forces attached to the 1st Marine Division in 2004 was mixed. However, in many cases, such as Operation al-Fajr, Iraqi units proved to be a critical factor and attested to the benefits of close, joint operations between the Coalition and Iraqis. In the image above, Iraqi soldiers train in preparation for the fight to clear Fallujah in November 2004.

The principle enshrined in Lawrence's 15th article—"Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than you do it perfectly"—underpinned much of the Marine Corps' approach to its return to Iraq.¹⁰³ To help build Iraqi security forces and put an Iraqi face on operations, the Marines planned to reintroduce the Vietnam-era Combined Action Program. The 1st Marine Division aimed to take one platoon from each battalion and transform it into an integrated CAP platoon that integrated Marines and Iraqi security forces. The Marines in this platoon would be given extra language and cultural training.¹⁰⁴ As in Vietnam, the purpose of the CAP platoon was to strengthen local forces, better prepare them to fight what was ostensibly an *Iraqi* and not an American war, and also build closer relations between American forces and local security units.

As also in Vietnam, Marine Corps platoons would be partnered with and would train larger Iraqi units. The Marines tasked with participating in the program were given an intense 20-day language training course.¹⁰⁵ While none of the Marines were expected to become fluent in less than three weeks, the training was nevertheless helpful. First Lieutenant Charles E. Anklam III noted that the biggest benefit of the language training was not so much that Marines could effectively communicate with the Iraqis, but that it allowed them to demonstrate to partnered indigenous units that they were attempting to broach the linguistic and cultural divide to form a closer, cooperative bond.¹⁰⁶

The Marines tasked with working in the CAP program looked to the Marine Corps' past experiences, in particular the use of the CAP in Vietnam, read Bing West's *The Village*, examined case

studies, and also listened to lectures from former CAP Marines.¹⁰⁷ In general, however, there was little guidance with regard to how the CAP units would be organized or what their actual mission would be. “There was no clearly defined mission statement,” recalled Lieutenant Anklam.¹⁰⁸ “It was just a rough commander’s intent.”

Two notable examples were CAP Platoon Golf 3 and CAP India. The first was built around a platoon from Company G, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, partnered with the 503d Iraqi National Guard Battalion.¹⁰⁹ The second platoon, built around Marines from Weapons Company, 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, and Company I of the 505th Battalion of the Iraqi National Guard, would participate in the Second Battle of Fallujah in November 2004 and would distinguish itself as the only Iraqi National Guard unit to fight alongside Marines on the frontlines of the battle.¹¹⁰ For many of the CAP Marines, the Combined Action Program was a considerable force multiplier. Lieutenant Anklam recalled, “When you look at it in the grander scheme of things, one platoon with a company of [Iraqi Civil Defense Corps Units] affected tremendously large amounts of space—entire towns and villages. To receive that same level of success and passive nature in the town would have required probably company-size elements to do the same thing.”¹¹¹

The use of the CAP underscored a number of notable elements of I MEF’s plans for the 2004 deployment. The goal was to defeat the insurgency, not the insurgents. The Marines hoped that building a close relationship with the Iraqis would discourage them from joining the insurgency. At the same time, the CAP platoons could possibly motivate Iraqis to take part in their own defense. As General Mattis recalled,

We identified three groups of enemy, or potential players on the battlefield. The tribes, there were criminals amongst them, and what we thought we needed for them was jobs and securing them, the

locals. Then we had the former regime elements. These were the recalcitrant ones, the ones who chose to be irreconcilable. There were criminals amongst them, too. And then we had the foreign fighters, not many, when you ran into them, because you generally didn’t take prisoners. They fought to the death.¹¹²

Thus, al-Anbar presented the Marines with a range of different threats. To gain further understanding in ways to confront the challenges, Mattis and his staff consulted with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) to gain their insights into riot control and techniques for reducing and controlling gang violence.¹¹³ Mattis and his staff took classes taught by LAPD officers on gang violence and security issues and observed how they policed the city. LAPD explosive experts also helped to train 55 infantry battalions on improvised explosive devices and also deployed with the Marines to Iraq.¹¹⁴

The overall counterinsurgency, population-centric approach recalled David Galula’s own observations on the Algerian War. Yet, it was also one that stemmed from the Marine Corps’ own history. As one Marine lieutenant noted on the CAP, the “Marine Corps [has] actually been doing programs similar to that basically through its history. I mean, you look, and there’s a heavy resemblance to it in Nicaragua, Haiti, and the South American campaigns back in the early 20s and 30s. We didn’t have the moniker ‘CAP’ onto it, but the mission was very much the same.”¹¹⁵

How unique the Marine Corps’ plans for Iraq actually were is open to debate, however. While Marine leaders made a point of drawing distinctions between the Corps’ approach and the Army’s reliance on artillery and heavy firepower,¹¹⁶ it is important to remember that Army units in Iraq were also making changes to their tactical approach to the insurgency by 2004. Beginning in the summer of 2003, the commander of the Combined Joint Task Force 7 (the principal Coalition command in

Iraq from 2003–4), Lieutenant General Ricardo S. Sanchez, USA, acknowledged that the “iron-fisted approach to the conduct of [operations] was beginning to alienate Iraqis.”¹¹⁷ He subsequently ordered units to scale down the size of their operations and focus on precision strikes on specific insurgent targets. His overall plan identified the support of the Iraqi population as its center of gravity, with lines of operation focusing on governance, information operations, essential services, and economic recovery.¹¹⁸

Individual unit commanders devised similar approaches, often on their own initiative. Major General David H. Petraeus, who commanded the United States Army’s 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) during its 2003 operations in the northern Iraqi town of Mosul, focused on protecting the population and restoring local governance. At the same time that I MEF was preparing for its second campaign in Iraq, Major General Peter W. Chiarelli, commander of the U.S. Army’s 1st Cavalry Division, was conducting “full-spectrum” operations focused on separating the population from the insurgency. General Chiarelli also consulted with local leaders and sheikhs to gain a better cultural understanding of the Iraqi population and built a close working relationship with the United States Agency for International Development’s Iraq mission.¹¹⁹

Thus, Army units were already developing in-the-field tactics and operations similar to those being developed by Marine Corps planners. Perhaps the most innovative aspect of the Marine Corps’ plan, then, was its singular focus and new perspective. While Army commanders such as Chiarelli and Petraeus had already laid the groundwork for a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq, not all Army units followed course. With each division granted wide latitude to conduct operations, there was a lack of organization and direction in the Army’s efforts in the country. This was compounded by the difficult conversion of the Army V Corps into the Coalition headquarters in Iraq, the Combined Joint Task Force 7. The



Photo by LCpl Gabriela Garcia
Marine commanders were not alone in developing new counterinsurgency tactics for Iraq. As I MEF prepared to redeploy to Iraq, MajGen Peter W. Chiarelli, USA (pictured above as a lieutenant general in 2006), led the 1st Cavalry Division in full-spectrum operations designed to isolate the insurgency from the Iraqi populace.

task force never had the necessary staff with which to effectively conduct and coordinate operations throughout the country.¹²⁰ Consequently, it was often difficult to build upon the efforts of single division, brigade, and battalion commanders.

Both Generals Conway and Mattis provided a coherent vision for what they expected of I MEF and the 1st Marine Division. This vision was tied to the Marine Corps’ history and culture. Each commander made a point to remind the Marines that the coming campaign was not a new, unfamiliar one. The Marine Corps had fought small wars

and counterinsurgencies throughout its history. It had fought these wars not by following doctrinal dogma, but by using sound judgment, quick thinking, and ensuring that its actions did not alienate the population from the Americans. General Mattis' letter to all hands written in March 2004 synthesizes the basic Marine Corps approach to counterinsurgency in Iraq. "The enemy will try to manipulate you into hating all Iraqis. Do not allow the enemy that victory. With strong discipline, solid faith, unwavering alertness, and undiminished chivalry to the innocent, we will carry out this mission. Remember, I have added, 'First, do no harm' to our passwords of 'No Better Friend, No Worse Enemy.' Keep your honor clean as we gain information about the enemy from the Iraqi people."¹²¹ Importantly, Mattis situated the current mission within the Marine Corps' long history: "This is the right place for Marines in this fight, where we can carry on the legacy of 'Chesty' Puller in the Banana Wars in the same sort of complex environment that he knew in his early years."¹²² He also noted, "This is our test—our Guadalcanal, our Chosin Reservoir, our Hue City. Fight with a happy heart and keep faith in your comrades and your unit."¹²³

By invoking the memory of Lewis B. Puller, Mattis reminded the Marines of the 1st Marine Division that the current struggle in Iraq would be similar to the Banana Wars and other small wars that had shaped the Marine Corps' history during the early twentieth century. At the same time, though, by referencing major campaigns in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, the general stressed that the current struggle would require just as great a skill and understanding of warfare, both regular and irregular, as the battles of those conflicts.

As noted earlier, the ability of Marine Corps commanders to offer a clear intent and purpose to their subordinates and the units under their command would constitute an important feature of Marine counterinsurgency and small wars campaigns. Colonel Julian D. Alford, who would command the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, in both



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

In this image from the Nicaragua intervention, Lewis B. Puller (second from left) stands with two members of the Nicaraguan National Guard. As the 1st Marine Division deployed to Iraq, MajGen Mattis declared, "This is the right place for Marines in this fight, where we can carry on the legacy of 'Chesty' Puller in the Banana Wars in the same sort of complex environment that he knew in his early years."

Afghanistan and Iraq between 2004 and 2005, remarked on the importance of building a common understanding between commanders and subordinates in counterinsurgency warfare in order for those subordinates to carry out orders and conduct operations in accordance with their commander's overall goals. "When I said 'left,' they knew exactly what 'left' meant."¹²⁴ Colonel David J. Furness, who commanded Battalion Landing Team 1/1 in Iraq in 2005 also remarked on the critical role commander's intent played, noting, "If you're going to be successful in a decentralized fight, you have to operate on commander's intent. . . . What I learned from watching General Mattis at the division level [is how he would] go down to the PFC level and just embed his ideas, his thought process, what was important to him down to the private.



Photo by LCpl Joel A. Chaverri

While the 1st Marine Division planned to focus on pacification and security operations during its 2004 deployment to Iraq, the year was dominated by the struggle to clear and secure the city of Fallujah. In this image, Marines from the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, set up a 60mm M224 mortar as the battalion advances into the city.

I said, okay. That's what I have to do when I get battalion command."¹²⁵

During March 2004, I MEF gradually relieved the 82d Airborne Division and took over responsibility for operations in al-Anbar Province (later designated Multi-National Force-West). Within weeks of the force's arrival, four contractors from Blackwater International were ambushed and murdered in Fallujah. Both the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, L. Paul Bremer, and the Bush administration believed that allowing the murders to go unanswered would damage American authority and allow an increasingly unstable situation to spiral out of control. Faced with the prospect of conducting a large-scale assault on the city, the very kind of assault many had criticized the Army of conducting during 2003, both Generals Conway and Mattis recommended a more restrained response in which they hoped to locate and kill the actual perpetrators. Both command-

ers contended that such an aggressive assault was precisely what the insurgents hoped the response would be.¹²⁶ Despite their opposition, however, higher headquarters ordered a general offensive against the city on 5 April 2004. Three Marine battalions attacked the city in what became Operation Vigilant Resolve, the First Battle of Fallujah. After three days of fighting, outrage among both Iraqis and the Iraqi Governing Council caused by the attack and civilian deaths was so great that the Marines were ordered to stand down.¹²⁷ With the city still in insurgent hands, Generals Conway and Mattis met with a former Iraqi general and created the Fallujah Brigade in the hope that Iraqi forces would be able to secure the city. The brigade would ultimately prove a failure, however, and the city soon became an insurgent stronghold.¹²⁸

The First Battle of Fallujah marked the beginning of a series of battles fought between I MEF and the Iraq insurgency throughout its deploy-

ment in 2004. These included fighting between insurgents and Marines and soldiers in al-Anbar's capital, ar-Ramadi; the Battle of an-Najaf against Shia militants led by Muqtada Sadr in August 2004; and Operation al-Fajr, a second offensive against Fallujah that cleared the city of insurgents. The latter, involving two regimental combat teams, an Army brigade combat team, supporting ground units, air support from the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing, as well as Iraqi Army units, would constitute one of the largest battles fought by the Marine Corps since the Battle of Hue City in Vietnam.¹²⁹ The battle saw fierce street fighting at close quarters as the Marines and soldiers methodically cleared each city block of insurgent forces.

Thus, the summer and winter of 2004 were markedly different than the Marine Corps had planned. Lieutenant Anklam recalled,

The perceived mission statement that we were going to fall in on would be less an offensive nature at the time and more along the lines of supporting the Iraqi security forces, helping to redevelop the infrastructure in the towns and communities via providing a stable, war infraction-free environment . . . but obviously that took a backseat pretty quick, once we got into Iraq.¹³⁰

Conclusion: The Marine Corps and Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2003–4

As in Afghanistan, the march up to Baghdad during the opening weeks of Operation Iraqi Freedom demonstrated the Marine Corps' skill at conducting an operation based on maneuver principles. I MEF was able to cross overland at an operational pace equal to the Army's V Corps, something that would have been unthinkable during the 1970s. However, the dramatically swift victory over Saddam Hussein's forces led almost immediately into

a new phase of the war marked by a general insurgency against both the U.S. occupation and the Iraqi government, which would gain sovereignty in 2004. Consequently, almost as soon as I MEF returned to the United States, it began to make preparations for a return to the country. In planning for the return, Marine Corps leaders looked to the service's past as a counterinsurgency force, and even devised plans to implement a new version of the Vietnam-era Combined Action Program. The plan aimed to secure and protect the Iraqi population in order to cut off support for the insurgency. This entailed dismounted patrolling, a reticence to use extreme force, engagement with local Iraqi leaders, and training and equipping Iraqi security forces to partner alongside American forces. However, while I MEF did not abandon this plan when it arrived in Iraq, its efforts were nevertheless overshadowed by the fierce fighting in Fallujah, ar-Ramadi, and an-Najaf that ultimately fueled the insurgency even further and came to define the Iraq War for much of 2004.

At the end of 2004, I MEF's primary focus was preparing for Iraq's first national elections. In helping to organize and ensure the elections took place in a stable environment, the Marines were participating in a mission that it had performed on several occasions in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua during the 1920s. Nevertheless, the threat environment for the coming year remained uncertain. The year 2005 would see a range of operations along the Euphrates River as the Marines of both I and II MEF fought to contain the insurgency and disrupt its flow of supplies and personnel into central Iraq and Baghdad. Marines would continue to make efforts to engage the population and build local infrastructure. However, lack of adequate forces coupled with a general push from the Coalition headquarters to reduce the American footprint in Iraq hindered efforts to conduct a large-scale counterinsurgency program.

Chapter 4

The Marine Corps Rediscovered Counterinsurgency

The Iraq insurgency and the deployment of I MEF to al-Anbar Province in the spring of 2004 spurred a renewed interest in the subject of counterinsurgency in the U.S. Marine Corps. To confront the challenges in Iraq, Marine Corps leaders, such as 1st Marine Division commander General Mattis, devised a comprehensive strategy that focused on dismounted patrolling, engaging the population and local leaders, separating the population from the insurgents, and resurrecting the Vietnam-era CAP program to help build the Iraqi military. While the Marines of I MEF sought to implement these tactics and achieve the goal of building a working relationship with the Iraqi population, pressure to conduct a general offensive against Fallujah at the beginning of April, followed by uprisings in ar-Ramadi and an-Najaf, turned the Marine Corps' focus from the Iraqi population to destroying the insurgency and interdicting its supply lines.

This change of focus in theater did not blunt an increased interest in counterinsurgency and irregular warfare within the Marine Corps. Many Marines began to discuss the topic in earnest, and *Marine Corps Gazette* saw a spike in articles on counterinsurgency, irregular warfare, and small wars. This new attention permeated the Marine Corps' training commands, including the Marine Corps Combat Development Command, the Marine Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, and the Marine Corps Command and Staff College. In all of these organizations, Marines and civilians worked to adapt education and training for the current conflict in Iraq. These efforts entailed exploring the Marine Corps' past as a counterinsurgency force and then applying both those experiences and the recent experiences in Iraq



Photo by LCpl Nathan A. Heusdens
Col John A. Toolan, commanding officer of Regimental Combat Team 1, talks to an Iraqi outside Fallujah in March 2004. Later that year, Toolan would become the director of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College where he applied many of the lessons he learned in Iraq to a new course curriculum.

to shape a predeployment training regimen that would prepare Marines for the specific cultural environment of Iraq and other states where they were likely to be deployed during the Global War on Terrorism.

As the first units of I MEF returned to the United States in the fall of 2004, many of its officers were given the opportunity to shape Marine Corps training and education. General Mattis, com-

mander of the 1st Marine Division from 2003 to 2004, became the commanding general of Marine Corps Combat Development Command. One of his subordinates, 1st Marines commanding officer Colonel Toolan became head of the Marine Corps' Command and Staff College. Other important directors at this time were Colonel Ronald L. Bailey of the Expeditionary Warfare School and Colonel Walter L. Niblock of the Marine Corps War College. While these officers did not seek to turn the Marine Corps away from its mission as an expeditionary force-in-readiness, they nevertheless sought to strengthen knowledge and understanding of counterinsurgency within the Corps through reforms to the combined-arms exercise, the syllabus of the Command and Staff College, and the creation of new centers of study on the subject.

Renewed Interest in Counterinsurgency: Marine Corps Gazette and Counterinsurgency

A survey of articles in *Marine Corps Gazette* from 2004 to 2007 attests to the increased interest in counterinsurgency within the Marine Corps. In 2004, just eight articles in *Marine Corps Gazette* referenced the subject of "counterinsurgency." In 2005, the number more than tripled to 29. In 2006, there were 37 articles referencing "counterinsurgency" and in 2007 there were 72. Counterinsurgency became a topic of interest throughout the Marine Corps as Marines sought not only to devise new strategies for fighting the Iraq War, but also to prepare the Corps for future fronts in the Global War on Terrorism. The journal's editors fostered discussion by publishing reviews of important works on counterinsurgency, printing a bibliography of major works on irregular warfare, and even reprinting its seminal article from 1962 by David Galula, Victor Krulak, and G. K. Tanham on fighting insurgencies (see chapter 1).¹ For some of the journal's contributors, it seemed as if a new era had emerged and that Hammes and Van Creveld's conception of a fourth generation of warfare was coming to pass. For others

though, preparing for the future meant relearning basic tactics and techniques that had been a part of the Marine Corps' warfighting philosophy for decades.

Most articles on counterinsurgency focused on proposing new ways that the Marine Corps could adapt to better fight insurgencies and irregular warfare. These ranged from revising old tactics to a large-scale restructuring of Marine Corps units. Captain David J. Danelo argued that knowledge of simple Arabic phrases and words could constitute a "tipping point" in the struggle to win the support of the Iraqi population.² A number of Marines argued for adapting the major doctrinal tenets of the past decade to the situation in Iraq. In 2004, Major Karl C. Rohr recommended melding pacification with expeditionary maneuver warfare. This entailed rebuilding a target nation's infrastructure as soon as the assault objective had been captured and achieved. "As we see today in Iraq, such a policy of progressive occupation/reconstruction would have better served the pacification efforts by providing a military-governmental structure to the newly liberated countryside in the wake of the assaulting forces."³

Major Adam T. Strickland made a similar defense of maneuver warfare principles in 2005, contending that the proposals for new counterinsurgency doctrine made at organizations such as U.S. Joint Forces Command and the Marine Corps Combat Development Command threatened to turn the Marine Corps away from maneuver warfare. "As the saying goes, 'dance with the girl you brought,' and for the Marine Corps, this means maneuver warfare."⁴ Major Strickland argued that both *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1: Warfighting* and the *Small Wars Manual* provided Marines with all of the information they needed for planning and conducting effective counterinsurgency. "From cover to cover, [*Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1: Warfighting*] outlines operational considerations for conducting small wars, counterinsurgency operations, and in-

formation operations.”⁵ Maneuver warfare’s focus on flexibility, speed, and developing solutions based on a full understanding of the battlefield was as relevant and effective in conventional warfare as irregular, counterinsurgency warfare. Strickland illustrated the point with a “how-to-list” for counterinsurgency drawn from maneuver warfare doctrine: establish appropriate expectations, remember the basics, determine security needs, continue professional military education, ask to what will the people respond, establish a lawful and legitimate security presence, create a local census, remain sensitive to the locals when engaging the enemy, and be aware that money does not solve every problem.⁶ As Strickland concluded, “*MCDP 1* gives us all the guidance we need and, therefore, makes many of the ongoing projects at places such as [U.S. Joint Forces Command] or [Marine Corps Combat Development Command] unnecessary, or at a minimum, in need of a serious rudder change.”⁷

Strickland’s article testified to the *Warfighting* concept’s broad, flexible, and in many ways, non-doctrinaire approach to warfare. A year later, he provided further arguments for better organizing the Marine Corps for counterinsurgency operations, laying out a detailed proposal for restructuring the Marine infantry platoon.⁸ Strickland’s plan involved a four-squad infantry platoon that included mechanized elements as well as Iraqi or Afghan soldiers in training. The overarching intent was to create an infantry platoon capable of deploying over a wider geographic area at a higher operational speed, thus “producing the appearance to locals of being anywhere and everywhere at all times further reinforcing the perception of security.”⁹ As with many Marine units deployed to Iraq in 2004, Strickland suggested removing the platoon’s organic fire-support elements, such as its mortar sections. Strickland described the transformation of the Marine Corps, writing, “During this process we have returned to our past and rediscovered keys to the successful prosecution of the three-block war as found in



Photo by A1C Randy S. Mallard, USAF
Shortly after the first phase of the Iraq War ended and the anti-American insurgency began, retired Marine general and former Central Command commander Gen Anthony C. Zinni (pictured above as a lieutenant general in 1995) noted, “If we’re talking about the future, we need to talk about not how you win the peace as a separate part of the war, but you’ve got to look at this thing from start to finish. It’s not a phased conflict; there isn’t a fighting part and then another part. It is nine innings.” His comments would help define many of the changes to the Command and Staff College courses that began in 2004 and 2005.

the experiences of the Banana Wars and with the employment of the Combined Action Program in Vietnam.”¹⁰ His conclusions reflected the Marine Corps’ general approach to counterinsurgency: adaptation through a rediscovery of the past.

Other Marines were more critical of the ability of existing doctrine to confront insurgencies. In 2005, Captain David E. Cooper flatly wrote, “The organic assets of a Marine expeditionary force were not designed to effectively fight a counterinsurgency.”¹¹ Arguing that military forces often serve supporting roles in a counterinsurgency, Captain Cooper proposed granting Marine expeditionary force commanders control of



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LtGen James N. Mattis (pictured here as commander I MEF) speaking at Camp Pendleton. During his term as commander of Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Mattis introduced a number of new initiatives designed to strengthen irregular warfare education in the Marine Corps.

interagency and nongovernmental organization assets. This would better maximize the resources at their disposal and allow the Marines to draw on their services, knowledge, and skills to rebuild infrastructure, acquire a better understanding of Iraqi culture, and undermine the legitimacy of insurgent forces.¹² Colonel Mark F. Cancian, commenting on the utility of the *Small Wars Manual* in Iraq, noted that “the manual was published in 1940, just as the Marine Corps was reorienting itself from small wars to amphibious operations. The experience of World War II and then Korea, Vietnam, and the Cold War focused the Marine Corps as an institution on large-scale amphibious operations against conventional forces.”¹³ Colonel Cancian criticized the Marines’ overriding focus on force protection, claiming that the need to protect Marines from casualties at all costs threatened

to alienate Iraqis, as civilians would inevitably be killed as Marines reacted to potential threats. A 2005 essay by Captain Scott A. Cuomo criticized the Marine Corps’ lack of any kind of doctrinal publication specifically on irregular warfare for captains and junior officers to read and apply. “In the past few years we’ve heard much about the future being dominated by irregular warfare (IW), but little of our doctrine reflects this reality—and few of our field training exercises do either.”¹⁴ Captain Cuomo further argued that the United States was ill prepared for potential wars, lacking effective doctrine and organizations to battle insurgent forces. “We need a Scharnhorst—Pete Ellis—or David Galula-type individual to inspire a new [irregular warfare] doctrine and warfighting culture for success in the twenty-first century.”¹⁵ In an article on the “metrics” and means for evaluating

success in counterinsurgency, Lieutenant Colonel H. Thomas Hayden wrote that the conventional structure and organization of the military led it to perceive all threats through a conventional war mind-set and subsequently assess success and victory through conventional means. As a result, counterinsurgency lacked effective metrics for determining success.¹⁶

Some Marines, both active duty and retired, expressed concern and encouraged caution as the military leaders pushed for greater innovation and adaptation in the face of the insurgent threats in Afghanistan and Iraq. Paying such close attention to counterinsurgency at the expense of other types of warfare threatened the versatile and general-purpose character of the Marine Corps. Retired Marine Colonel Charles L. Armstrong warned that the surge in interest in counterinsurgency, while welcome and necessary, threatened to create an atmosphere of “groupthink” that could stifle innovative and imaginative thinking.¹⁷ Colonel Thomas L. Cariker warned of creating “one-trick ponies” and stated concerns about transforming the Marine Corps structures before major warfighting requirements had been identified and defined. Requirements of “fleeting political importance” were not a sufficient reason to restructure the Corps in Cariker’s estimation. Instead, he recommended identifying secondary missions and training Marines for those secondary roles.¹⁸ “Simply put, it is more expedient to train for a secondary mission than to eliminate and then have to reconstitute specialized or uniquely trained forces like artillery and tanks.”¹⁹ For example, Cariker cited instances in Grenada, Somalia, and Iraq where Marine Corps artillery battalions and batteries were deployed as provisional infantry, security forces, and civil affairs units.

Observing this sudden increase in focus on counterinsurgency, retired Lieutenant Colonel Frank G. Hoffman argued that Marines needed to focus more on “hybrid wars.” The term, first proposed by Hoffman and General Mattis in an article in *Proceedings* the previous year, described

a type of war that “blended the lethality of state conflict with the fanatical and protracted fervor of irregular warfare.”²⁰ Hoffman proposed that the Marine Corps’ general-purpose capabilities and versatile nature made it ideally suited for these types of conflicts. Hoffman pointed out that “we have historically worked at transition operations, transitioning from peace to crisis response, from ship to shore, and between the blocks of the three-block war.”²¹ The challenge was not to prepare for purely irregular or purely regular wars, but to train for “hybrid” conflicts, such as the one faced by Israel in Lebanon in 2006.

The debates within the Marine Corps reflected in the pages of *Marine Corps Gazette* featured many of the same concerns and arguments that had shaped similar discussions about irregular warfare and conventional warfare that took place after the Banana Wars and in the wake of the Vietnam War. Once again, an overriding issue was the identity of the Marine Corps as a warfighting force. However, whereas in previous debates the issue had tended to resolve itself into a competition between whether or not the Marine Corps was a small wars force or a service dedicated to large-scale, amphibious landings, the debates during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars focused more on balancing and reconciling these two important traditions in the Marine Corps’ history. Few Marines called for change so radical that it would redefine the Corps as a service. Instead, they advocated new areas for training and a renewed focus on nonconventional threats within the overarching doctrinal concepts of expeditionary warfare.

Revisions at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College

Before 2004, the primary aim of the Command and Staff College curriculum was to teach Marines the basic operational capabilities of the Marine air-ground task force. The curriculum included sections that addressed counterinsurgency, such as the Military Operations Other Than War class,



Photo by Dr. Nicholas J. Schlosser

The Marine Corps University's component schools all underwent curriculum changes to help prepare Marines for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

as well as a number of electives on topics exploring insurgencies, irregular warfare, and small wars, but these only constituted a small segment of the Command and Staff College's curriculum.

However, a number of veterans of both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars attending the college criticized the school's lack of instruction on irregular warfare.²² Following their second tours to Iraq, General Mattis and one of his regimental commanders, Colonel Toolan, were appointed to billets in the Marine Corps education establishment. General Mattis was promoted to lieutenant general and became commanding general of Marine Corps Combat Development Command in the summer of 2004. In October 2004, Colonel Toolan became the director of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College.

Within months, Colonel Toolan's influence over his new command could be felt. During the first half of 2005, the Command and Staff College began a significant restructuring of its curriculum to better address such issues as cultural

awareness, interagency operations, and foreign language training.²³ At the same time, a renewed interest in topics relating to small wars and irregular warfare could be felt, and the school invited experts to speak about irregular warfare and counterinsurgency and held lunchtime seminars on similar topics.²⁴ The 2004–5 academic year began to reflect the new interest in cultural awareness and small wars. The Theory and Nature of War, Strategy and Policy, Operational Level of War, Art of Command, and Warfighting . . . from the Sea sequence of courses continued to be taught. However, the hours for the Operational Level of War was cut from 233.5 hours to 213.5 hours and the hours for Warfighting . . . From the Sea was cut from 601.5 hours to 470.25 hours. These were the most substantial of a number of cuts in credit hours designed to create room for a new sequence of classes titled Small Wars, lasting 117.75 hours.

A new series of classes was added to the Warfighting . . . From the Sea course, titled Contemporary Warfare in a Joint/Multinational En-

vironment. The titles for the classes reflected the pressing concern with the Iraq War. Iraq's Violent History in The Twentieth Century featured historian Phebe Marr as a speaker and examined the country's history from the uprising against Britain in 1920 to the present.²⁵ U.S. Interests, Policy, and Strategy vis-à-vis Iraq examined American foreign policy with regard to Iraq, particularly in the period immediately after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks.²⁶

Iraqi Culture aimed to provide students with a broad understanding of Iraq's culture and history, with specific attention paid to religion, society, nationalism, the legacy of colonialism, and how Iraqis perceived both the United States and the West as a whole.²⁷

The final campaign planning exercise for the Warfighting . . . From the Sea course, titled Nine Innings, stated that students needed to think about campaigns that included not only the fighting, but also the peace. The syllabus opened with a quotation from General Zinni about the Iraq War:

At the end of the third inning we declared victory and said the game's over. It ain't over. It isn't going to be over in future wars. If we're talking about the future, we need to talk about not how you win the peace as a separate part of the war, but you've got to look at this thing from start to finish. It's not a phased conflict; there isn't a fighting part and then another part. It is nine innings.²⁸

General Zinni's comments framed the course's goal: to teach Marines to conceptualize campaigns that included the full gamut of operations, from warfighting to peace operations, and to be able to concurrently conduct all of these operations. As the course outline noted, "A clear lesson from the military campaign in Iraq is that the defeat of the enemy's military forces may not always equate, or lead to, attaining the final end state of the over-

arching mission statement. It is imperative that essential nation-building planning takes place in close concert with other precampaign planning, long before the execution of operations begins."²⁹ The course stressed that knowledge of a nation's interests, armed forces, politics, cultural conditions, and economic situation were as critical to achieving victory in stability operations as knowledge of the enemy's order of battle. The syllabus stated that "we need to treat learning knowledge of culture and developing language skills as seriously as we treat learning combat skills: both are needed for success in achieving U.S. political and military objectives."³⁰ Using Iraq as a case study, students needed to account for the general motives of the insurgency; grasp the regional relationships in the Middle East; understand U.S. policy in the region; comprehend the tribal relationships among Sunnis, Shias, and Kurds; and have a firm knowledge of Iraqi culture and religion.

Along with the new Contemporary Conflict area of study added to the Warfighting . . . From the Sea course sequence, the 2004–5 syllabus also included a new sequence devoted entirely to the subject of small wars. The syllabus for the new course sequence, Small Wars and Operations Other Than War, began with a criticism of the term "low-intensity conflict," thus immediately alerting students that this course would be a break with classes on irregular warfare taught in previous semesters.³¹ The syllabus also included the following quote from historian and soldier Harry G. Summers Jr., justifying the use of terms such as "small wars" over vague and bureaucratic descriptions such as "military operations other-than-war":

Unlike [Low-Intensity Conflict], small wars is blunt, and in being blunt it truthfully and explicitly alerts the American people to the dangers they face. Not the least of its advantages is that it forces policy makers and decision makers to . . . confront the messy military and political

realities small wars entail and the military and political costs they exact.³²

The course outline continued to highlight that “unfortunately, most military professionals in the United States are unaware of the theory and history of small wars, the nature of operational art in the context of small wars, and often seem supremely uninterested in the subject.”³³ The writers of the syllabus acknowledged that this state of affairs was not surprising, due to the distinction drawn between conventional war and the so-called military operations other than war (MOOTW). The course described MOOTW as “an orphanage for doctrinal concepts that cannot find a permanent home elsewhere” and also noted that the popular term “stability operations” was an inadequate concept for fully addressing the challenges of insurgencies and other small wars. The writers of the syllabus concluded that “the point is that the traditional forms of diplomatic, economic, and military coercion that we studied in the Strategy and Policy course and find useful for dealing with states and regular armies are often not applicable when dealing with the nonstate actors that seem to populate the current geo-strategic landscape and account for much of the world’s misery.”³⁴

The course’s primary objective was to strengthen students’ abilities to “think critically about small wars and operations other than war.”³⁵ Lecture and seminar topics included small wars theory, the Philippine War, the Malayan emergency, the Vietnam War, and the conflict in Northern Ireland. Most of these were topics addressed in the Command and Staff College’s Military Operations Other than War course. However, a renewed sense of urgency underlay their instruction. Whereas before, the case studies were taught as a means of preparing Marine officers for theoretical counterinsurgencies, now they were taught to help them plan and fight a counterinsurgency that was taking place while they were actually in the classroom.

Among the theoretical works assigned in the class were studies by Callwell, Trinquier, and the *Small Wars Manual*; Bard E. O’Neill’s *Insurgency and Terrorism*; Wray R. Johnson’s *Vietnam and American Doctrine for Small Wars*; and Friedrich Freiherr von der Heydte’s *Modern Irregular Warfare: In Defense Policy and as a Military Phenomenon*. The syllabus described the last work, written by a former member of the Wehrmacht who commanded paratroopers during the Second World War, as “perhaps the best theoretical work on the nature of irregular warfare.”³⁶ The class on the Philippines War included Robert Asprey’s *War in the Shadows*; John Morgan Gates’ *Schoolbooks and Krag: The United States Army in the Philippines, 1898–1902*; and Brian McAllister Linn’s *The Philippine War, 1899–1902*. Linn also delivered a guest lecture during the course. Assigned readings for the class on Malaya included Robert Thompson’s *Defeating Communist Insurgency*. The class on Vietnam featured readings by Trinquier; Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr.’s *The Army in Vietnam*; and Harry G. Summers Jr.’s *On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context*. In short, the course focused on the seminal, classic studies of the major counterinsurgency and small wars operations conducted during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The Command and Staff College’s revised curriculum went into effect during the 2005–6 academic year. The new curriculum was summarized in the following way:

Mission: Informed by the study of history and culture, Command and Staff College educates and trains its joint, multinational, and interagency professionals in order to produce skilled warfighting leaders able to overcome diverse 21st century security challenges.³⁷

Among the new areas of instruction introduced to the curriculum were a Culture and Interagency Operations course designed to improve students’ understanding of regional cultures and



Official Department of Defense photo

Throughout the 2000s, Command and Staff College syllabi on small wars stressed that, despite the adjective, these types of wars remained just as difficult to fight as conventional wars. The Vietnam War was frequently examined as a case study. In this image, Marines advance on a Viet Cong position during Operation Harvest Moon.

religions and strengthen their conception of small wars, peacekeeping and multinational operations, and strategy and policy. The class also aimed to examine the “complex relationships between social, political, ideological, and economic elements of war.”³⁸ Case studies were, unsurprisingly, drawn from the Middle East and other parts of Asia. The language courses further underlined the new attention to culture. The classes focused on skills beyond simple communication, and entailed cultural understanding, local customs, and small group interaction.

The overall revision to courses of study emphasized cultural studies, anthropology, and a renewed interest in small wars and counterinsurgency. In 2005–6, the new curriculum went into effect, with a number of notable changes. Whereas before 2005–6, the curriculum allotted small wars and military operations other than war their own, independent sequence of classes,

the new curriculum sought to integrate the topics associated with irregular warfare. In short, the curriculum aimed to end teaching warfare as either conventional or irregular war; the courses recognized that counterinsurgency was not an operation “other than war.”

The 2006–7 academic year reveals the new areas of interest and emphasis. The Warfighting . . . From the Sea and Operational Art course sequences remained the largest blocks of instruction at the college, comprising a little more than half of the total class hours.³⁹ This was not substantially different from the 2002–3 academic year, when the two blocks also comprised about 50 percent of the course hours.⁴⁰ However, the actual classes within each sequence underwent considerable transformation. Warfighting . . . From the Sea was expanded to include a new block on contemporary conflict, which addressed the Global War on Terrorism, security coopera-

tion, stability and support operations, and counterinsurgency.⁴¹ The 2006 Marine Corps University command chronology summarized the course, writing,

[Warfighting . . . From the Sea] is designed to deliver an understanding of planning and execution methodologies within the framework of joint and Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) doctrine; inculcate an ability to conceptualize, coordinate, and synchronize a broad spectrum of resources and yield productive effects across the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of warfare; and analyze contemporary issues and emerging challenges facing the military professional.⁴²

The sequence also included a block on counterinsurgency planning. Planning exercises focused on instructing students in addressing conventional and irregular threats “while enhancing students’ ability to plan integrated [Marine air-ground task force] operations in a joint, interagency, and multinational environment.”⁴³ A major new characteristic of the curriculum was its integration of the elective sequence into the different course sequence. The Warfighting sequence incorporated a range of electives such as Advising Indigenous Security Forces, Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction, and Postconflict Reconstruction and Economics. While a significant number of credit hours were now devoted to studying topics on irregular warfare, the Warfighting sequence nevertheless retained its focus on teaching Marines the skills needed to plan contingency and amphibious operations.⁴⁴ The third and fourth blocks of instruction focused on a practical application exercise in which students were asked to plan the Marine Corps contributions to a hypothetical contingency operation defending Tunisia against an aggressive Libya. The exercise tested students’ skills at planning operations

for a Marine expeditionary brigade and a Marine expeditionary force and envisioned a conventional battle between Coalition and Libyan forces.⁴⁵

The Art of Command sequence was replaced with a string of courses on leadership that not only included classes on command decisions at Gettysburg and Chancellorsville, but also case studies examining the My Lai massacre, the Abu Ghraib abuse scandal, and an exercise on negotiations. The Operational Level of War was replaced with the sequence Operational Art, which presented a range of courses on regular and irregular campaigns. Thus, while the sequence continued to examine large-scale amphibious operations in World War II and Korea, and other land-based conventional operations such as in World War I and Operation Desert Storm, it also included classes on French colonial theory, World War I in Africa, the Algerian revolution, the Malayan emergency, and the Soviet war in Afghanistan.

The Culture and Interagency Operations set of courses was perhaps the most significant addition to the Command and Staff College curriculum and the one that most symbolized the new interest in small wars and cultural studies. Course titles included *The Ugly American*, *Anthropology and Sociology*, *Americans and the World*, *The Colonization of Africa*, *The Decolonization of Africa*, *World War I: War Termination*, *China’s Rise as a Global Power*, *The Philippine Insurrection*, *the Vietnam War*, *Arab Nationalism*, *the American Civil War*, *UN Peacekeeping*, *Iraq: Background and Dilemma*, *Planning World War II*, and *World War II: Occupation of Germany and Japan*. The electives offered for the sequence included *Counterinsurgency Warfare: A [Special Operations Forces] Perspective*; *Theory and Practices of Negotiation*; *The Middle East: A Cultural Analysis*; and *The Professional Military, Ethics, and Moral Decision Making*.⁴⁶ As with the sequence on Operational Art, the Culture and Interagency Operations courses ranged from studies of regular warfare to irregular wars, as well as postwar stabilization operations.



Photo by LCpl William L. Dubose

Recognizing the influence of cultural sensibilities on the successful conduct of counterinsurgency, the Marine Corps University's expanded curriculum included new language courses and instruction in cultural anthropology. In this photo, an Iraqi translator and a Marine speak with an Iraqi teacher in ar-Ramadi in 2006.

Thus, students were not only taught about the operational and strategic planning for World War II, but also about postwar governance and occupation in Germany and Japan. Students learned about the events of World War I as well as how that war came to an end, and also explored the origins and development of Arab nationalism. The old bifurcated curriculum that established conventional warfare as the primary course of study and small wars and military operations other than war as an ancillary topic of interest had been replaced by a new curriculum that balanced conventional warfighting, small wars, and postwar occupation while also teaching students about the culture and history of the regions to which they would be deployed.

Another novel addition to the curriculum was 94 hours of instruction in French and Arabic.⁴⁷ That sub-Saharan French was taught reveals Command and Staff College's belief that Ma-

rines could possibly conduct contingency operations there in the near future. The focus of these classes was on "culturally astute oral communications."⁴⁸ Sample scenarios for instruction in Arabic included counting, knowing the days of the week and months of the year, describing people, meeting indigenous officers, meeting with tribal chiefs, visiting an Iraqi military hospital, and visiting an Iraqi petroleum minister. The designers of the course stated that language skills "are an operational necessity" and "an integral part" of the Command and Staff College's curriculum. Role-playing exercises in which students were required to conduct mock negotiations were also added to the course of study.⁴⁹ The overall aim was to train Marines to engage in "polite, ice-breaking conversations" with government officials, citizens, and military officers. Thus, the aim of the class was not to make Marines fluent in Arabic or French, but to allow them the oppor-

tunity to “shape a favorable tactical environment for negotiations through an interpreter.”⁵⁰ Consequently, the course was consequently as much a class on etiquette, local customs, and cultural awareness as it was a class on communication and vocabulary. Notably, students were not just tested on their language skills, but also on their ability to work with an interpreter.⁵¹ During the 2007–8 academic year, Chinese and Korean were also added to the list of languages taught.⁵²

The revised Command and Staff College curriculum that came into effect in 2005–6 and 2006–7 constituted an important change in the Marine Corps educational establishment. By integrating electives and placing courses on conventional and irregular warfare alongside each other, instructors and Marine Corps planners aimed to address the pressing need to train Marines for the conflict in Iraq by introducing a new emphasis on cultural awareness, history, and past small wars and irregular war campaigns. In short, Command and Staff College aimed to provide staff officers with the training necessary to conduct operations in a three-block war. Less than a decade since General Krulak had first written about the concept, Command and Staff College’s revised curriculum demonstrated a concerted effort to prepare staff officers to fight wars and conduct stability operations simultaneously. Thus, the overall aim was not to reorder the entire curriculum around fighting counterinsurgency, but to expand the definition of war itself. Cultural awareness, postwar reconstruction, and civil-military affairs were just as critical to planning and conducting campaigns as engaging and defeating regular military forces in the field. Importantly, though, the curriculum did not claim that these elements were *more* important than the skills required to conduct conventional campaigns. Consequently, the new curriculum aimed to reinforce and strengthen those elements of training that had long been a part of Marine Corps training: situational awareness, small-unit leadership, taking initiative, and expanding the

base of knowledge and tools available to Marines as they confronted obstacles toward defeating the enemy in the field.

New Centers, Programs, and Doctrine

Beginning in 2004, the Marine Corps Combat Development Command initiated a range of new programs and organizations to strengthen counterinsurgency training within the Marine Corps. In doing so, though, it maintained its focus on the core principles and philosophy of maneuver warfare. Among the major programs initiated by commanding general Mattis and his successor, General Amos, would be the creation of the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning, Marine Corps Center for Irregular Warfare, and a number of new warfighting publications, including the *Small-Unit Leader’s Guide to Counterinsurgency*. Other publications included *Counterinsurgency*, *Army Field Manual 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5* produced in collaboration with the U.S. Army, and the *Multi-Service Concept for Irregular Warfare* created with the U.S. Special Operations Command. The Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory also conducted several war games analyzing urban combat and irregular warfare, while the Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities commenced research projects on past insurgencies and counterinsurgencies.⁵³

The overall goal behind the command’s projects was to strengthen the teaching and understanding of irregular warfare without causing a radical departure from the core principles entailed in *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1: Warfighting*. At the same time, there was also a push to rethink and reassess conceptions from before the Global War on Terrorism, such as network-centric warfare. The unpredictability of the Iraq insurgency and the lack of success of high-value targeting to weaken the insurgency brought forth a new appreciation for the unpredictable character of warfare in general. Whereas, before the Iraq War, a number of Marine leaders sought to reconcile net-



Photo by SSgt D. Myles Cullen, USAF
During his term as commander of Marine Corps Combat Development Command, LtGen Mattis worked closely with Army LtGen David H. Petraeus (pictured here as a full general) to devise new doctrinal publications on counterinsurgency for both the Army and Marine Corps.

work warfare with maneuver warfare (see chapter 2), now planners brought into question whether the two were truly compatible. A briefing given at the October 2004 General Officer's Symposium declared that

The global contest against terrorists and like-minded adversaries is going to be part of a continuing long-term conflict. This suggests a need to build upon the expeditionary skill set and Small Wars legacy to improve the capacity to counter irregular or blurring modes of warfare. The U.S.'s current capability overmatch in conventional operations will continue for some time, but now the Nation must achieve the same level of capability in more unconventional situations.⁵⁴

The symposium reaffirmed the central principles of maneuver warfare, including the stress on speed, flexibility, and ability, with emphasis on the

constantly changing nature of conflict. "Thus, the maneuver warfare approach encourages constant adaptation, improvisation, and agility at both an institutional level and operational level."⁵⁵

The symposium also addressed the emerging complementary concept of "distributed operations." The concept entailed a style of warfighting in which operations would be decentralized and small units given wide autonomy to take initiatives in the field. The idea focused on increasing the effectiveness of Marine Corps small-unit commanders in the field by allowing them to operate with considerable leeway and independence. "Decentralized operations, facilitated by the commander's intent, pushes decision making down to the lowest level, leveraging the superiority of Marine small-unit leadership and agility, and accelerates the speed and tempo of friendly operations."⁵⁶ The emphasis on expanding the small-unit leaders' ability to act quickly on intelligence and seize the initiative in a combat situation was considered particularly effective in the counterinsurgency environment emerging in Iraq. Thus, even as Marine leaders recognized the need to strengthen training in irregular warfare, they still maintained a focus on the basic principles of maneuver warfare.

As in the curriculum at Command and Staff College, culture and cultural studies continued to shape Marine training in counterinsurgency warfare. Among the first and most visible new programs introduced by the Marine Corps Combat Development Command to address this need was the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning within the Marine Corps Training and Education Command. The center, also known by its acronym CAOCL, was established in May 2005 to enhance cultural studies within the Marine Corps, deliver language training, and provide Marines deploying overseas with a sound understanding of the culture, language, and customs of the region in which they would be operating.⁵⁷ In the words of General Mattis, "Our Marines must be comfortable operating in



Photo by Sgt Steven King

Providing Marines with a stronger understanding of the cultures and languages in theaters of operation was a priority of organizations such as CAOCL. Here, Raja Bachra, a language instructor with USMC Forces, Special Operations Command Foreign Language Office, copies the lesson of the day in Arabic for the students in her class.

austere, very complex environments including those where firepower is not the primary means of victory, or may even be counterproductive.”⁵⁸ The program had its origins in the fall of 2004 with a Training and Education Command Training Symposium held on 17 November 2004, followed by the publication of a concept paper for an operational cultural studies center published in January 2005.⁵⁹

Its creation marked an important transition in the Marine Corps with regard to how culture was taught to Marines before deploying. As the commander of I MEF (Forward) from 2006 to 2007, Major General Richard C. Zilmer noted, “We recognize that dealing in a counterinsurgency in the Middle East, or in the Arab world, requires a fundamental understanding of culture,

which gets back to some of the things we’re now doing as a Corps.”⁶⁰ Previously, the weight of culture briefs during the deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan was focused on teaching Marines particular customs and rules of etiquette to prevent them from insulting and potentially alienating members of the local populace. It had usually been done quickly by the operating forces and Marines in the field and rarely had a single individual or organization to turn to with questions regarding Iraqi or Afghan culture.⁶¹

With the creation of CAOCL, the Corps began providing Marines in the field with a central clearinghouse for cultural questions and linguistic instruction.⁶² The center also sought to treat culture as a critical element toward accomplishing missions and to make it an embedded part of

the planning process.⁶³ With the focus on training Iraqi security forces, and the heavy reliance on Iraqis for intelligence, an understanding of local personalities, group dynamics, and the overall cultural landscape of an area of operations was considered a decisive means for defeating insurgent forces.⁶⁴ Through a mixture of face-to-face and distance learning facilities, instructors from the center engaged each battalion deploying to Iraq, providing gradual, methodical, but nevertheless focused instruction in cultural and linguistic issues of relevance to the deploying force.⁶⁵

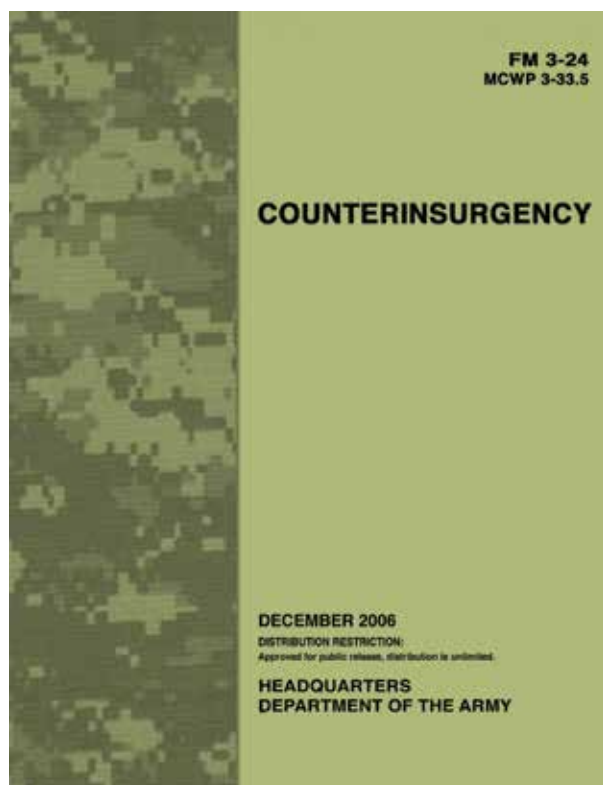
In January 2006, General Mattis added a Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning Center of Excellence. The center aimed to build a cadre of career Marines versed in the relevant culture and language of potential areas of operation. Thus, the center sought to avoid bringing too narrow a focus to its mission by focusing only on Iraq and Afghanistan, and aimed to identify and study other countries and regions to which Marines would be deployed.⁶⁶ The members of the center would identify Marines with potential linguistic skills, coordinate and develop new curriculum with the president of the Marine Corps University (who also served as the commanding general of Education Command), and participate in the drafting of new doctrine with the Marine Corps Combat Development Command Doctrine Division. The director of the center was also responsible for serving as the Training and Education Command representative on all committees addressing issues regarding culture and language.

Another organization chartered by the Marine Corps Combat Development Command was the Center for Irregular Warfare, also known by the acronym CIW. Created in May 2007, the center aimed to strengthen understanding of irregular warfare in the Marine Corps. The organization's charter acknowledged that Marines had engaged in small wars and irregular warfare throughout its history.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the charter's author, Mattis' successor General Amos, frankly noted,

"However, these capabilities have not normally been among our strengths." The basic challenge for the CIW and the Marine Corps as a whole was to enhance the Marines' ability to apply "the widest spectrum of military capabilities, across the continuum of warfare, and in all phases of a campaign, against irregular threats in order to defeat foes that use nontraditional methods against us."⁶⁸ The center's definition of irregular warfare included stability and reconstruction operations, civil-military operations, counterinsurgency, information operations, operational cultural knowledge, and foreign internal defense. The center comprised a cadre of experts with experience in irregular warfare as well as education in counterinsurgency, civil-military operations, and information operations.

Among the center's tasks were coordinating irregular warfare doctrine; researching topics related to irregular warfare; advising the Commandant of the Marine Corps, the commanding general of Marine Corps Combat Development Command, and the commanding general of Training and Education Command; and coordinating and consulting on curriculum development at the Marine Corps University, the Marine Corps Training Command, and the Marine Air-Ground Task Force Training Command.⁶⁹

Along with new centers for culture and irregular warfare, the Marine Corps Combat Development Command also developed a range of new doctrinal works to bring together recent lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan and provide Marines guidance for future deployments. Most of these were completed and published by the end of 2006, and included a number of works written in cooperation with Special Operations Command and the U.S. Army. In June 2006, the Marine Corps printed *Small-Unit Leader's Guide to Counterinsurgency*. From the outset, the guide stressed it was not an unchangeable work of dogma, but a working document subject to change and alteration as new lessons were learned in the field (it remains *Marine Corps Interim Publica-*



Official Department of Defense photo
The product of a joint Marine and Army effort, Field Manual 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5: Counterinsurgency, was printed in 2006. Like the Small Wars Manual, it was as much a synthesis of past lessons learned as it was a guide for conducting future campaigns.

tion 3-33.01). The opening page featured a note to readers requesting that they submit suggestions and changes.⁷⁰ In the foreword, Lieutenant General Mattis also noted that “these [tactics, techniques, and procedures] provide methods for reference and are not prescriptive.”⁷¹

The manual characterized small wars and counterinsurgencies as conflicts waged primarily by small units. The actions of every soldier, from the company commander down to the private could have an impact on the overall counterinsurgency campaign. Consequently, it was critical that subordinates be able to operate with little supervision and allow the company commanders to better understand the nature and character of the insurgency throughout their area of respon-

sibility and operations. As with other works on the subject going back to the *Small Wars Manual*, the handbook stressed the primacy of the political dimension of the counterinsurgency, and noted that the military played an ancillary role within the broader campaign. The handbook stated that commanders needed to plan operations while considering local languages, religion, social makeup, means of income, standard of living, and the civil infrastructure. To understand the enemy, leaders needed to learn how the insurgency was mobilized, who its key leaders were, and how it adapted and utilized networks to operate.⁷²

The *Small-Unit Leaders' Guide to Counterinsurgency* argued that the population was the center of gravity of a counterinsurgency campaign and devoted an entire chapter to the topic of mobilizing the populace.⁷³ On the issue of “winning hearts and minds,” the manual concluded, “The ‘Hearts’ dimension seeks to persuade the populace that their interests are best served by the [counterinsurgency] force’s success. . . . The ‘Minds’ dimension seeks to persuade the populace that the [counterinsurgency] force is going to succeed in its mission.”⁷⁴ Consequently, the best way for the counterinsurgency force to mobilize the populace was to both demonstrate that defeating the insurgency was in its best interest and convince the populace that the counterinsurgents were committed to achieving victory and a sustainable solution.

To achieve this, counterinsurgent forces needed to rely on local intelligence, conduct constant patrols, and build relationships with key members of the population. The handbook provided Marines with a close and detailed outline on patrolling, presenting the different types of patrols (foot, motorized, helicopterborne), the types of missions that could be accomplished through patrolling (reconnaissance, combat), and how to plan each type. The manual advised Marines to provide clear, detailed planning and thorough reconnaissance for patrolling missions, and coun-

selected small unit leaders that “your unit’s success in [counterinsurgency] will be heavily influenced by how well it can patrol at the small unit level.”⁷⁵ Patrols could never be routine, and their primary goal was to provide at least the impression to the populace that Marines could emerge anywhere and anytime.

Like many doctrinal treatises on counterinsurgency, such as those by Galula and Trinquier, the *Small-Unit Leaders’ Guide to Counterinsurgency* argued that the population was the center of gravity in an insurgency. The manual still contained many elements that characterized it as a Marine Corps document, however. For example, the handbook contained a list of five standards and rules of ethics that all units needed to adopt. Two of the axioms would have been familiar to Marine veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom: “No better friend, no worse enemy” and “First, do no harm.”⁷⁶ The manual’s stress on small-unit operations can also be seen throughout the older *Small Wars Manual*. The overtly flexible, provisional nature of the document was also a quality common to certain Marine Corps doctrinal publications. As with the seminal *Warfighting*, the *Small-Unit Leader’s Guide to Counterinsurgency* aimed to provide Marines with a work that presented advice and guidance without instilling a strict framework that could potentially stifle initiative and imagination. As with other Marine Corps doctrinal works, it left the door open for the possibility that better approaches or tactics could be devised in the field.

One of the most publicized doctrinal publications on counterinsurgency from this period was compiled in collaboration with the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, *Field Manual 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5: Counterinsurgency*. The manual was assembled by a Marine Corps–Army team with significant input from civilian scholars and experts on counterinsurgency warfare.⁷⁷ Among the most notable of the Marine Corps team’s contributions was the manual’s

fourth chapter, “Designing Counterinsurgency Campaigns and Operations.”⁷⁸ The chapter noted that campaign design had the potential to be the most important element of a counterinsurgency campaign. It stressed the necessity of keeping campaign plans flexible, adaptive, and dynamic. The chapter featured a detailed vignette on the 1st Marine Division’s planning process and operations during Operation Iraqi Freedom II. Drawn from an interview with General Mattis, the section presented the division’s plan to devise unique approaches for each major actor in the al-Anbar insurgency: the tribes, the former regime elements, and the foreign fighters.⁷⁹ The chapter also included a vignette on the French campaigns in Spain during the Peninsular War (1808–14), using that conflict as an example of how a large conventional army can lose a campaign by failing to assess and understand the culture and society of the environment in which it is operating.⁸⁰

Counterinsurgency superseded the previous Marine Corps manual on counterinsurgency, *Fleet Marine Force Manual 8-2: Counterinsurgency*, and was released with considerable fanfare, including media appearances by some of its authors and a review in *The New York Times* by future ambassador of the United Nations, Samantha Power.⁸¹ Its reception among Marine veterans of counterinsurgencies was mixed. Lieutenant Colonel Charles L. Armstrong (Ret), an advisor of counterinsurgency campaigns in El Salvador, reviewed the manual in *Marine Corps Gazette*.⁸² Colonel Armstrong noted a number of minor drawbacks, in particular the manual’s lack of stress on the need for U.S. forces to learn and function in the language of the region in which they are conducting counterinsurgency operations. The manual’s considerable length also led Armstrong to question how useful such a doctrinal work would be for the small-unit leader. Armstrong noted that “the manual is ‘directed primarily at leaders and planners at the battalion level and up.’ In every insurgency I attended, the tip of the spear was the battalion and *down*.”⁸³

The document's sheer length meant that it would be difficult for young Marines deploying for the first time to thoroughly read and adequately digest the manual's guiding principles.

Former Marine and frequent chronicler of Marine Corps operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, Francis "Bing" West concurred with Armstrong, writing, "While the prime readership was intended to be battalion commanders, it was difficult to find more than a few who had read the entire document."⁸⁴ He also noted the reaction of a Marine battalion commander to the counterinsurgency theories being posited by commanders, stating that foot patrols remained the centerpiece of battling insurgencies.⁸⁵ In 2009, Major General John F. Kelly, a veteran of Marine operations in Iraq as 1st Marine Division's assistant commander in 2003–4 and the commander of I MEF (Forward) in 2008–9, stated, "Well, I think the counterinsurgency manuals we had in the past were perfectly good, in my personal opinion. I think the counterinsurgency tactics, techniques, and procedures we learned from Vietnam and other counterinsurgencies were very valid."⁸⁶

As Armstrong noted, however, the manual was not intended to be a dogmatic, prescriptive outline perfectly applicable to all insurgencies no matter what the local conditions and circumstances actually were. Major Alfred B. Connable, an intelligence officer with both I and II MEF, commented that the manual effectively presented security as the primary issue in counterinsurgency and noted that it was "a kind of an accumulation of conventional wisdom on this subject, and it goes through, point by point, a list of things you have to do in order, and it says to establish security."⁸⁷ Thus, perhaps *Counterinsurgency's* authors' greatest accomplishment was not in creating a prescriptive instruction manual for devising a counterinsurgency campaign, but in assembling a comprehensive summary of relevant

counterinsurgency tenets and principles distilled into a single doctrinal publication.⁸⁸

Conclusion

The Iraq War, and in particular the al-Anbar insurgency, spurred a dramatic renewal of interest in counterinsurgency within the Marine Corps. This small-wars renaissance was spurred largely by Marine commanders in the field such as Generals Conway and Mattis as they confronted the challenge of fighting the insurgency in al-Anbar Province in 2004. In the United States, Marines and analysts also began a discussion of counterinsurgency in professional journals such as *Marine Corps Gazette*. The participants in these debates included both active duty Marines who had already fought in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as veterans of past counterinsurgencies in Vietnam and Central America.

Following the completion of his tour as the 1st Marine Division commander, General Mattis would become commanding general of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command. Upon taking command, General Mattis strengthened the focus on counterinsurgency within the Marine Corps training establishment. He directed the creation of new centers devoted to providing Marines with training in cultural anthropology and foreign languages and also ordered the revision of Marine Corps doctrinal publications to better prepare small-unit leaders to fight insurgencies.

By stressing the Corps' versatility and flexibility as a general-purpose contingency force, those supporting better counterinsurgency training focused on those elements of the Marine Corps that made it well suited to small wars. Thus, this renewed interest in counterinsurgency did not lead to a fundamental restructuring of either the Marine Corps or its central warfighting principles.

Chapter 5

Adapting Marine Corps Combat Units to Counterinsurgency: Training in the United States and Adapting in the Field

While the Command and Staff College revised its curriculum to better prepare Marine officers to plan irregular warfare campaigns, other elements of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command were tasked with quickly preparing the Service's combat units—many deploying to Iraq in a matter of months—for fighting counterinsurgency. The Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, California, rapidly adapted the combined-arms exercise to the conditions of the war in Iraq, focusing its training regimen on operations in densely populated areas in which roads and buildings could all be booby-trapped and insurgents could masquerade as civilians. Within just a few years, the annual combined-arms exercise became Exercise Mojave Viper, an immersive live-fire environment that focused on irregular warfare. Many of the lessons used to build the Mojave Viper exercise were acquired from combat unit experiences in the field. Thus, a symbiotic relationship existed between the Marine Corps' training commands and the units deployed to the theaters of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many of these lessons were passed on from battalion to battalion, a testament to the close-knit nature of the Corps.

This chapter first examines the transformation of the combined-arms exercise into Exercise Mojave Viper. It will then consider how Marine combat units learned and adapted in the field, focusing on two battalions deployed to al-Anbar in 2005 and 2006, respectively.

Revising the Combined-Arms Exercise

The combined-arms exercises and training programs held at the Marine Corps Air Ground



Official Department of Defense photo
Live-fire exercises have long been a staple of Marine Corps training. In this image from 1942, a Marine officer dashes through live machine-gun fire along the blitz course at Quantico.

Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, California, had been a part of Marine training since the 1970s.¹ By the 1980s, the combined-arms exercise had become one of the most important parts of Marine training, providing Marines with a live-fire environment in which they could hone and

practice combined-arms operations. Beginning in 2004, the Marine Corps began to revise the combined-arms exercise (more commonly called by its acronym CAX) to better prepare Marines for the second deployment to Iraq. This revised combined-arms exercise (RCAX), focused on allowing all ground combat units the opportunity to conduct live-fire training, convoy operations, fire-support exercises, and operations in urban areas.² The training center also constructed a facility specifically dedicated to urban operations and created a Small Warfare Training Unit, which was deployed to support exercises at March Reserve Air Base in California.

Over the course of the next two years, the combined-arms exercise underwent further adaptations and ultimately became Exercise Mojave Viper. The primary objective of these changes was to transform Twentynine Palms into a “mission-centric” facility that trained Marines to prepare for shifting conditions and new threats.³ Importantly, the revised exercises sought to focus on training both combat and support units.⁴ The creation of two separate exercises testified to the new threat environment of the insurgency. No frontlines existed, and Marine Corps installations were often vulnerable to insurgent sniper and rocket attacks. Convoys were frequent targets and were vulnerable to improvised explosive devices (IED’s). Consequently, it was important to prepare combat service support Marines in combined-arms tactics and operations. The revisions to the exercises were the most recent iteration of one of the oldest Marine Corps principles: “Every Marine a rifleman.”

The RCAX lasted 11 days, and 12 revised exercises and provisional revised exercises were conducted between May and December 2004. Throughout 2005, \$65.5 million was expended on construction projects to create a pair of urban warfare ranges designed to resemble Iraqi towns and a live-fire convoy course.⁵ By the end of 2006, when the revised exercise had become Mojave Viper, the mock-up village Wadi al-Sahara contained around 400 buildings, in-

cluding government buildings, a village center, business areas, residences, and a mosque.⁶ Role players replicated town activities in minute detail, and the mock-up village featured elected officials, unemployed individuals, businessmen, utility workers, civil servants, and both government and private security forces.⁷ Role players were also expected to change and adapt their activities based on the actions of Marines. The role players who were treated with respect by Marines could choose to cooperate while those mistreated could choose to withhold intelligence or support insurgent forces, who were also represented by role players in the training village. The Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center command chronology for 2005 concluded, “The large-scale, Combined-Arms [Military Operations in an Urban Terrain] complex will permit large units to truly ‘operate within’ an urban area and present unique opportunities for both air-ground integration and cross-boundary coordination.”⁸

Role players were one common element of all of the revisions to the combined-arms exercise. Actors performing as Iraqi civilians helped provide Marines with a sense of the threat environment. A variety of different roles were created for the civilian actors to replicate the potential variety of individuals, groups, political attitudes, and threats Marines would face in Iraq. The command chronology for 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, which deployed to Iraq with I MEF in 2004, laid out a range of role descriptions for a dismounted presence patrol. Some of the roles included

Script 1: You are a local cleric. Your town has been out of power for 24 hours. You are very upset with the lack of power and believe that Americans don’t care about Iraqis. You want to know why the power has not been fixed. You approach the Marine patrol with these complaints. When shots are fired you try to get out of the way.



Photo by LCpl Jason S. Hughes

Marines prepare to fire an 81mm mortar from their LAV-M during a CAX conducted in 2000. During the subsequent decade, this exercise conducted at Twentynine Palms would place a greater focus on counterinsurgency operations and be transformed into Mojave Viper.

Script 9: You are a Former Regime Loyalist. You walk up behind a crowd talking to a Marine patrol. You are concealing a weapon and fire at the Marines. You then hand off the rifle to another FRL. You both run from the Marines.

Script 15: You are a local Iraqi going about your business. When shots are fired you stop to see what is going on.⁹

Another scenario, meant to train Marines in operating a vehicle checkpoint, presented a wider range of roles, including Iraqi policemen assisting the Marines, arms dealers trying to get past the

checkpoint, an injured Iraqi and his friend trying to get assistance from Marines, and four Iraqis conducting a drive-by shooting.¹⁰ A third scenario, which focused on conducting a mounted patrol, featured a similar mix of regular Iraqis and insurgents attacking Marines. The scenarios tested the Marines' ability to conduct combat operations in an area densely populated with civilians, many of whom believed Americans were indifferent to their struggles. Of the 25 roles listed in the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines' command chronology for dismounted patrolling, 8 depicted Iraqis disgruntled with the lack of power and the perception that the Americans did not care about the Iraqis. Three de-

picted “former regime loyalists” and 14 depicted local Iraqis going about their business.

All three scenarios focused on basic operating procedures and assessed whether and how well Marines engaged with the population. The mounted patrol scenario included a step asking, “Did the Marines properly assess the situation and adhere to the rules of engagement when presenting their weapons at the particular target?”¹¹ The scenario assessing vehicle checkpoints asked whether units complied with rules of engagement and whether the unit had a plan “for communication with locals, e.g. interpreter, hand and arm signals, etc.”¹² Thus, the predeployment training focused on preparing Marines to operate among civilians as much as it did on engaging insurgents. By 2006, the role-playing scenarios had evolved to feature a complex and diverse mock-up population that represented that of al-Anbar Province, with the majority of civilians depicted as Sunnis and the majority of Iraqi soldiers depicted as Shia.

In November 2006, the revised combined-arms exercise was redesignated Mojave Viper.¹³ The exercise was designed to be a “mission rehearsal” for Marine battalions going to Iraq. The exercise now lasted 30 days and featured not only combined-arms training, but also urban warfare exercises and nonmilitary training. The new Mojave Viper exercise consisted of two phases. The first focused on combined-arms training (as the Twentynine Palms exercises had always done), while the second trained Marines in urban warfare. The combined-arms training lasted 14 days, during which platoons and companies practiced infantry attacks and staffs refined fire-support skills. In order to prepare Marines for the insurgency/counterinsurgency environment, the exercise also included training in precise targeting and estimating collateral damage. Infantry Marines also took a combat patrol course. During this period, noninfantry and combat service support Marines conducted a convoy operations course requiring them to direct a logistical support convoy along a 20-kilometer route with

tactical scenarios integrating rotary- and fixed-wing close air support and small-arms fire. Both the infantry and noninfantry courses prepared Marines to detect IEDs.

The urban warfare training course (the second phase of Mojave Viper) included scenarios designed to replicate conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Exercises within the course included tank and infantry integration, urban patrols, and IED training. Marines were further trained to conduct cordon-and-search operations and vehicle checkpoints. The course came to a close with a three-day, battalion-level final exercise meant to replicate a three-block war environment in which all of the course elements were addressed.¹⁴

To ensure that the exercise reflected lessons learned from the theaters in Iraq and Afghanistan, the members of the Tactical Training and Exercise Control Group (the command responsible for planning and conducting the exercise) maintained close contact with the Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning, the Joint [Improvised Explosive Device] Defeat Office, the Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned, and Marine commanders in al-Anbar Province.¹⁵ These lessons provided Marines with a realistic training environment and aided in IED equipment training, Iraqi culture briefs, expanded medical instruction, integration of unmanned vehicles into operations, and a combined-arms breaching course.¹⁶

The Mojave Viper exercise symbolized the manner in which the Marine Corps adapted and transformed itself to fight the Iraq insurgency. The changes, while significant, did not radically change or alter the Marine Corps’ role as an expeditionary force. Instead, they focused on adapting Marine Corps tactics and operational procedures to the current threat environment in Iraq in order to force Marines to train in an urban environment populated by civilians whose knowledge of insurgent activity was a key toward defeating the insurgency. By providing a course for noninfantry Marines, the exercise also reflected Colonel



Photo by JO1 Craig P. Strawser, USN

One of the most significant changes to the CAX was the emphasis on training for operations in densely populated urban centers. Iraqi-Americans, such as those pictured above meeting with Secretary of the Navy Donald C. Winter in 2006, would act as local nationals and play out scenarios to better prepare Marines for fighting an insurgency.

Thomas L. Cariker's recommendation that training Marines for secondary missions and roles was preferable to fundamentally reorganizing the entire Corps' structure and mission. A pamphlet printed and included within the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center command chronology for 2005 summarized the need to balance the Marine Corps' primary mission as an expeditionary force-in-readiness with the challenges in Iraq:

Marines will preserve the uniquely fundamental tenets of Expeditionary Maneuver Warfare and combined arms air-ground task forces, but will enhance and expand on these capabilities through developing distributed operations and sea-basing techniques. This will impact training at Twentynine Palms. Similarly, an emphasis on providing Marines with enhanced training and education in tac-

tical intelligence, cultural awareness, and urban operations will impact training at the Combat Center.¹⁷

Mojave Viper aimed to sharpen, hone, and enhance skills that had been considered part of Marine Corps training for decades. Its ambitious scope and close attention to detail also attested to the seriousness and energy the Marine Corps and Marine Corps Combat Development Command devoted to addressing the principal tactical challenges of battling the insurgency in al-Anbar Province.

Continuing Operations in Iraq: Learning and Adapting in the Field

Following the elections for a constituent assembly at the end of January 2005, the Iraq War entered a new phase as the Coalition continued operations to prepare for the elections to ratify the constitu-



Photo by LCpl Chad J. Pulliam

Marines from 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, move from building to building during a Mojave Viper exercise in 2008. To better prepare Marines for fighting in urban environments, an entire village was built from scratch at Twentynine Palms to replicate urban areas in Iraq and Afghanistan.

tion in October and then the first elections under that constitution in December 2005. Among the major goals of Multi-National Force-Iraq was to strengthen security and stability throughout the country and train, equip, and integrate the Iraqi Army into Coalition operations as a step toward transferring security missions to local forces and withdrawing U.S. forces. In light of this new mission, the Bush administration and U.S. commanders in Iraq envisioned a lighter footprint for U.S. forces and a reduced U.S. involvement in security and counterinsurgency operations in order to ensure that local forces would serve as the primary force for stability in the country.¹⁸

However, the persistence and virulence of the insurgency made such an approach difficult to implement, and 2005 saw American forces conducting a series of counterinsurgency operations designed to clear cities of insurgents, but often

without the necessary number of forces required to hold and secure them. This was particularly the case in al-Anbar Province. Thus, the Marines of both I and II MEF (which relieved I MEF as Multi-National Force-West in March 2005) were confronted with the challenge of devising and implementing new tactics and techniques to confront the insurgency.¹⁹

The period between 2005 and the end of 2006, when the Anbar Awakening began to take hold and the insurgency in al-Anbar began to collapse, was marked by experimentation and innovation as battalion and company commanders devised appropriate courses of action, often on their own initiative and without specific guidance from higher commanders.²⁰ The lack of adequate numbers of Marines and soldiers often forced planners to favor vehicleborne patrols instead of dismounted patrols. A 7th Marines re-

port on tactics, techniques, and procedures written after the regiment's return to the United States in 2005 presented a frank assessment, noting that "dismounted saturation patrolling, by definition, is not achievable under current troop strength."²¹ The report further recommended that such patrols

should not be conducted as a default but rather only when using them yields a specific advantage over the enemy. Doing otherwise gives the enemy a soft target and leads to repetitive mistakes. If you are using a dismounted patrol as a form of movement to contact you will loose [sic] and loose [sic] big in this environment, as the enemy will hit you with an [improvised explosive devise] from an undetectable position.²²

The report concluded that "despite our exhaustive efforts to 'win hearts and minds' the local population resents our presence in their streets and sees presence patrolling as occupation of their homeland." Such tactics, the memo argued, produced the opposite effect of that intended.

Other units and planners agreed, and much of 2005 was defined by mounted patrols and cordon-and-search operations designed to interdict and disrupt insurgent supply lines and their operations in the towns along the Euphrates River. These operations were part of a larger-scale campaign designated Operation Sayaid. Its aim was to secure the Euphrates River in time for the October and December 2005 national elections.²³ Due to the limited number of American forces available, Marine commanders in the region were forced to rely on maneuverability, speed, and concentration of force and firepower to break down the insurgent networks. However, while such operations as Operation Matador (in al-Qaim District) were initially successful, the limited number of Marines in theater meant that once U.S. forces withdrew, insurgent fighters would simply return. Colonel Stephen W. Davis,

the regimental commander responsible for all of al-Anbar from the Iraqi town of Hit to the al-Qaim District on the Syrian border, described the primary challenges facing the Americans there: "This is a [Regimental Combat Team] with a division mission in a [Marine expeditionary force]-plus battlespace."²⁴ He went on to note, "Because my force structure's so small, I don't have the ability to leave anybody in town who can make patrols . . . you've got to have people that stay there to give people security."²⁵

Faced with finding an immediate and lasting solution to the security problems in al-Anbar, Marine small- and medium-unit commanders developed new tactics and approaches in the field. The experience of two battalions serve as valuable case studies for how Marine units adapted in the field and then passed on their lessons and experiences to other units. In September 2005, the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Julian D. Alford, deployed to the al-Qaim District. Located on the Syrian border, the al-Qaim District included the towns Husaybah, Karabilah, Sadah, and Ubaydi. Since 2004, Coalition forces had faced persistent insurgent violence there, and by the middle of 2005, the district's urban centers had fallen under insurgent control, mostly from forces aligned with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's al-Qaeda in Iraq Islamist organization. While Marine units conducted a number of clearing operations in the area, such as Operation Matador and Operation Spear, these failed to permanently dislodge the insurgent forces from the region, and they returned to the district once the operation task forces withdrew to another area in al-Anbar.

Throughout 2005, the cohesion of the al-Qaim insurgency had begun to crack. While insurgents were united in their opposition to the United States, differences in how they perceived the central Iraqi government and Islam's role in everyday life caused fissures to emerge. While al-Qaeda in Iraq was a supranational Islamist force dedicated to dissolving the Iraqi government's

secular authority over al-Anbar and establishing a theocratic regime, al-Qaim's tribes such as the Albu Mahal sought to maintain their local authority, their stake in the smuggling routes that ran through the district, and were largely parochial in their outlook. As a result, fighting erupted between organizations, such as the Albu Mahal militia Katab al-Hamsa and al-Qaeda in Iraq. The Albu Mahal frequently requested support from the Multi-National Force-Iraq, but Coalition forces failed to coordinate with the tribal sheikhs when conducting operations in al-Qaim.

The 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, had been through one deployment to Afghanistan the previous year. Each company had distinct experiences, with some involved in fierce urban battles and others involved in stability operations.²⁶ The battalion's Company I operated in Ghazni Province, conducting hundreds of patrols, building relationships with the local population, and locating and seizing rockets, mines, and munitions found in weapons caches throughout the region. Its Company K, reinforced with elements from the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines' Weapons Company, patrolled and secured bases near Pakistan's border. Company L served as the security force for Bagram Airbase and as a quick reaction force for NATO. The company also supported the Afghan police forces, conducted humanitarian assistance programs, and provided security at polling stations during the October 2005 national elections.²⁷ Thus, Colonel Alford and his battalion were not interested in whether the Marines were maintaining a light or a heavy footprint, but in using all of the unit's available resources to provide a secure and stable environment.

Fortuitously, the majority of its personnel (including its principal company commanders and staff officers) would deploy with the battalion to Iraq the following year. Of the roughly 950 Marines who deployed with the battalion to Afghanistan, 700 deployed to Iraq. Colonel Alford remained the commanding officer. The Headquarters and Service Company and Com-



Official Marine Corps History Division photo
During its deployment to al-Qaim in the fall of 2005, LtCol Julian D. Alford's 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, implemented a range of counterinsurgency tactics and techniques that helped to clear the city of insurgent activity.

pany I commanding officers remained as well (albeit switching billets). The battalion's Weapons Company commander became the executive officer, and the commander of Company K became the battalion's operations officer. When asked the reasons for 3d Battalion, 6th Marine's success in Iraq, Alford responded that continuity of personnel and leadership between the two deployments was the most important factor. "When I said left, they knew exactly what left meant."²⁸

Colonel Alford was also a self-taught student of counterinsurgency, having digested major works by Galula and the *Small Wars Manual* before he deployed with his battalion. Upon analyzing intelligence reports from al-Qaim, Alford noticed a strange phenomenon occurring in al-Qaim District. Insurgents, who were once aligned in common purpose against the American forces, seemed to be fighting each other. "When we're there on our [predeployment site survey] in July of '05, there was a lot of fighting going on up in the city and [3d Battalion, 2d Marines] was like,

yeah that's red on red."²⁹ Just right there, I was like, well that's got to mean something, if they're fighting each other. I didn't know what it meant, but I wanted to find out what it meant."³⁰

The 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, thus resolved to take a new path to counterinsurgency. Rather than remain in the forward operating bases built up outside major urban areas in al-Anbar, the battalion's companies would patrol *inside* the al-Qaim District and live among the people there in platoon-sized battle positions. Doing so would achieve three objectives. First, the permanent presence of Marines would prevent insurgents from returning to the towns in the region. Second, their presence would help assure local residents that the Marines would not be withdrawing from the district. Third, operating inside the towns would allow the Marines to acquire better intelligence on the insurgency. The constant presence of Marines, Alford hoped, would encourage insurgent fighters to step forward with information. By living in the town, the Marines would also get a better sense of who the foreign fighters and who the locals were. It would also allow the Marines to better understand the social and cultural dynamics of the district and devise a means of action that would allow them to use that knowledge to help reduce the violence. To accomplish these objectives, 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, would also partner and work closely with Iraqi Army units.

Throughout its training for deployment to Afghanistan and Iraq, the battalion focused on the specific conditions it would face in that theater. Thus, in February 2004, the battalion transformed the final two weeks of its annual combined-arms exercise into a "foot-mobile" operation that included advisors and even mules transferred to Twentynine Palms from the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center in Bridgeport, California. In March, 100 Marines from the battalion underwent additional training at Bridgeport to create a specialized cadre of mountain warfare specialists within the unit. When 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, returned to the

United States at the end of 2004, it immediately focused on strengthening its skills at small-unit tactics and preparing for deployment to Iraq. It drew on a number of lessons from its experience in Afghanistan, the most important being the need to live among the local population.³¹ Once again, the battalion conducted a CAX and also participated in the new RCAX at Twentynine Palms, which focused on warfare in densely populated urban areas.³² The battalion's companies were restructured in a number of ways. An artillery and a truck company were attached to the Headquarters and Service Company, expanding it to more than 400 personnel. The Weapons Company's combined antiarmor teams were also disbanded and transformed into three mobile action platoons.³³ Predeployment briefs covered cultural awareness and the historical significance of Iraq to the United States.

Before the battalion could establish any kind of forward battle positions inside al-Qaim District however, it would need to clear the al-Qaeda in Iraq, forces from the district. Shortly after his battalion arrived in Iraq, Alford requested permission from Colonel Davis, his regimental commander, to conduct a large-scale clearing operation of al-Qaim's central towns. From 1 October to 5 October 2005, 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, conducted Operation Iron Fist to clear Sadah and the eastern part of Karabilah.

Through the following month, the battalion deployed its companies throughout the cleared areas of the district, where they subsequently acquired intelligence on the insurgency in the region and a better understanding of the fighting between the foreign fighters and local militias aligned with al-Qaim's tribes, most prominently the Albu Mahal. The success of Operation Iron Fist prompted the Marine commanders in al-Anbar to plan a final clearing operation of al-Qaim's remaining urban areas: Husaybah, Ubaydi, and the western sections of Karabilah. To conduct the operation, 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, was joined by the ground combat element from

the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit, Battalion Landing Team 2/1. From 5 to 19 November 2005, the two battalions swept through al-Qaim District in the largest Marine operation in Iraq since Operation al-Fajr. The force faced heavy opposition, especially on 16 November when an insurgent force ambushed a platoon from Battalion Landing Team 2/1, killing five Marines and wounding many more. By 19 November, however, Operation Steel Curtain had accomplished its primary objective. Al-Qaeda in Iraq's presence in al-Qaim had largely been neutralized, and the Marines had successfully established an array of battle positions stretching across the district from the Syrian border to the town of Ubaydi.

Throughout its deployment to al-Qaim, 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, focused on working closely with Iraqi forces. All battle positions were manned by a combined team of Marines and Iraqi soldiers. Since many in the largely Sunni district were wary of the Shia-dominated Iraqi Army, Multi-National Force-Iraq approved the creation of army units made up of locals and ensured that these new formations would not be deployed to other parts of Iraq. Among other important initiatives were the Desert Protector Force created by the Multi-National Force-Iraq and the Iraqi Ministry of Defense. The force included 200 initial recruits integrated into Iraqi Army units in al-Anbar. The intelligence and advice they provided to Coalition forces proved particularly valuable in al-Qaim during the fall of 2005.³⁴

By the time the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, prepared to return to the United States in the winter of 2006, insurgent activity in al-Qaim District had largely been neutralized and contained. The basic elements that had shaped the campaign to secure the district would lay the groundwork for future Marine Corps operations in al-Anbar Province. They included coordinating with Iraqi forces, living among the populace, working with local tribal elites and organizations, maintaining a permanent and visible presence in



Photo by Cpl Neill A. Sevelius
A Marine from 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, fights alongside soldiers from the Iraqi Army during Operation Steel Curtain. Throughout the operation to clear al-Qaim, LtCol Alford ordered all Marine units under his command to work closely with partnered Iraqi units.

the district's urban areas, and ensuring operations were informed by a sound and accurate understanding of local culture, issues, and concerns.

Many al-Anbari sheikhs also cited the struggle between the region's Albu Mahal tribe and al-Qaeda in Iraq as the start of what would become the Anbar Awakening. Kamis Ahmad Abban al-Alwani, the vice chairman of the Anbar Provincial Council, noted that "the first time [the Anbaris] started killing the terrorists was in the al-Qaim area, in the Albu Mahal and Karabla tribes."³⁵ The founder and director general of Iraqi Special Weapons and Tactics, Colonel Said Muhammed Muad al-Fahadawi, argued that "the Awakening started in al-Qaim, in the middle of 2005. The Albu Mahal tribe revolted and started

to awaken.”³⁶ Sheikh Ali Hatim Abd al-Razzaq Ali al-Sulayman al-Assafi, a tribal and political leader in al-Anbar, believed that the Albu Mahal tribe’s struggle with al-Qaeda in al-Qaim at the beginning of 2006 “was the first spark” that led to the eventual Awakening movement.³⁷

Operations of the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, in al-Qaim mixed engaging the population with lethal force. The battalion’s command chronology stated, “Every Marine, regardless of [military occupational specialty] was a rifleman and operated under enemy fire.”³⁸ To defeat the insurgents, the battalion relied on the full range of arms available to it, including AT-4 antitank rockets; M240, M2, and MK19 machine guns; 60mm and 81mm mortars; M1A1 tanks; and bombs, rockets, and other air-launched ordnance from Marine Corps helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft.³⁹ Battles were tough, house-to-house urban fights in which Marines focused on clearing each building of insurgent fighters. At the same time, the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, made a concerted effort to live with the populace. The approach provided them with valuable intelligence, as informants tipped Marines off to insurgent hideouts and the location of IEDs. Marines met with local elders and provided security for medical missions to local clinics.

The 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, serves as a case study for how the Marine Corps conducted effective counterinsurgency. Beyond the revised combined-arms exercise and cultural awareness briefs, there was no specific training geared toward counterinsurgency given to the battalion before it deployed. Overall, the keys to 3d Battalion, 6th Marines’ success were its aggressiveness, boldness, and sound understanding of the area of operations. Thus, while the battalion utilized its full combat power against the enemy forces, it did so while also ensuring that the population was both secure and had a stake in the outcome.

The 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, was not the first Marine Corps battalion to achieve success against the insurgency in Iraq, nor was it the first

to adapt to the specific conditions of the insurgency. However, its experience in both Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the fact that it deployed during a period when the Marine Corps training establishment was quickly designing and developing new exercises to prepare Marines to battle the insurgencies in both countries makes it a good example and case study of how the Marine Corps adapted to counterinsurgency. By assessing the situation in western Iraq and grasping the cultural and political dynamics of the region, the battalion was able to understand the impact of the insurgency on the western Euphrates Valley. The battalion subsequently drew on lessons it learned in Afghanistan to devise an approach that mixed the careful use of lethal force to clear the region of insurgents while also securing and separating the populace from the insurgency itself. In doing so, the battalion was able to draw on the intelligence resources of the Iraqis themselves, allowing them to better identify and target insurgents throughout the region.

This formula would be utilized by other battalions over the coming months as the Marines and soldiers of Multi-National Force-West worked to secure the still volatile city of al-Ramadi in 2006. The operations of 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, is instructive in this regard. Months before deploying to al-Anbar in the summer of 2006, the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines’ commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel William M. Journey met with Colonel Alford to discuss his operations in Afghanistan and al-Qaim with the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines.⁴⁰ As Colonel Alford noted, the long personal history between many Marine officers played an important part in disseminating lessons learned in the field. “We’ve spent many, many hours over the last 20 years drinking beer together and on occasion sipping a glass of whiskey, talking about this stuff . . . we literally know what each other think(s). And that’s a unique thing about the Marine Corps that you need to understand.”⁴¹ Among the lessons Colonel Journey drew from the experience of



Photo by Cpl Robert R. Attebury

LtCol William M. Jurney congratulates an Iraqi soldier for completing a training program. Jurney's 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, would adopt many of the same tactics utilized by Marines in al-Qaim to help clear and secure al-Anbar's capital, ar-Ramadi, in 2006.

3d Battalion, 6th Marines, and other successful Marine Corps and Army units was the balance between maintaining a constant presence in the population centers while using lethal force to destroy the insurgents and their ability to operate.

The battalion operated under the 1st Brigade Combat Team of the 1st Armored Division, commanded by Colonel Sean B. MacFarland, USA, in al-Anbar's capital and largest city, ar-Ramadi.⁴² During the battalion's tour, a critical shift among Iraq's tribal groups in al-Anbar occurred that would ultimately lay the foundation for a dramatic decrease in violence throughout the province. Since the summer of 2006, I MEF (Forward) commander General Zilmer, Colonel MacFarland, and other commanders in Multi-National Force-West had been working to enlist

the help of al-Anbari sheikhs to fight the insurgency in the province, now largely represented by al-Qaeda in Iraq. The tribes and sheikhs of the province had been largely unreceptive to U.S. initiatives to form an alliance during the years since 2003. Many were even involved in the insurgency. However, as al-Qaeda in Iraq sought more radical goals—including banning women from walking alone in public; targeting, torturing, and murdering policemen and anyone else working with the Coalition; encouraging sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shia; and instituting a general reign of terror and intimidation against the local population⁴³—and aimed to transform al-Anbar Province into a theocratic caliphate, many of the tribal leaders began to seek an alliance with the U.S. forces there. Al-Qaeda in Iraq

began to subvert and undermine the traditional authority of the tribes as well as usurp their involvement in smuggling operations throughout the province. Seeing U.S. public support for the Iraq War rapidly deteriorating, many al-Anbari tribal leaders also became apprehensive about the consequences of an American withdrawal. At the same time, American commanders had begun to question the efficacy of the Shia-dominated Iraqi Army to provide security in the Sunni-dominated province. Thus, by the summer of 2006, a variety of factors merged to lay the groundwork for an alliance between the United States and al-Anbari tribes.⁴⁴

The Anbar Awakening not only marked a shift in allegiance among the tribes from the insurgency to the Americans, but also a shift in what kinds of Iraqi security forces were most useful in the counterinsurgency campaign. The emphasis on building the Iraqi Army had only achieved modest results in Sunni-dominated al-Anbar, in part, because it was dominated by Iraqi Shia. As General Zilmer noted in early 2007, “Nationally, [recruiting for the Iraqi army] is not a problem. The problem is out here in Anbar Province, where 90 percent of your province is Sunni. . . . And trying to entice the Sunni young men to come out and join the army, that has proven problematic for us.”⁴⁵

As a result of these difficulties, the Coalition forces in al-Anbar shifted priorities toward building local police forces made up of young Iraqis from the various tribes in the province. Police forces provided intelligence and trust that the Army could not. Made up of locals, its members were able to rely on their links with the community to gain intelligence as well as recognize outsiders from al-Qaeda in Iraq.⁴⁶ Young al-Anbari men sought work and the tribal sheikhs sought a means for providing it to them. Thus, the police forces presented an effective means for countering insurgent operations in the region. At the beginning of 2006, there were about 2,000 members in the al-Anbar police force. By the following year, the number had reached 8,500.⁴⁷



Photo by Sgt Curt Cashour, USA
Sheikh Abdul Sattar of the Abu Risha clan helped organize and lead al-Anbar's Sunni tribes against al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2006–7 in what has become known as the “Anbar Awakening.”

Engaging the Iraqi tribes was not a new strategy. As seen in the previous chapter, the Marines of Task Force Tripoli worked closely with tribes in the Tikrit area to help build a secure environment there in the spring of 2003. The situation was significantly different in 2006, however. A constellation of factors came together as Marine and Army leaders attempted to build a cooperative arrangement with al-Anbar's tribes to secure the province. Perhaps most importantly, the violence in the region had reached a breaking point at which the tribal sheikhs realized that they would be better off siding with the Americans than with al-Qaeda in Iraq. “We realized that the people had had it with the situation,” recalled Sheikh Ahmad Bezia Fteikhan al-Rishawi, the brother of

Sheikh Abdul Sattar Abu Risha, the first leader of the Awakening.⁴⁸ Sheikh Wissam Abd al-Ibrahim al-Hardan al-Aethawi summarized the situation: “There was a common interest between us and them, and that is security for all.”⁴⁹

The key to securing al-Anbar was clearing the province’s capital, ar-Ramadi, of insurgents and reducing the violence there. Since April 2004, ar-Ramadi had been a center of insurgent activity (see previous chapter). Basic services in the city had broken down, and members of al-Qaeda in Iraq had proclaimed it the capital of a new caliphate.⁵⁰ As the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, arrived in August and September 2006 to take command, it faced considerable challenges. While the Anbar Awakening was rapidly emerging, its success was dependent on whether U.S. and Iraqi forces destroyed al-Qaeda in Iraq’s ability to conduct attacks. Such a task was made even more difficult by the organization’s effective use of highly visible attacks to break down public morale and create the perception that the city was in a state of chaos.⁵¹

Like other Marine battalions deploying to Iraq at this time, 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, participated in a Mojave Viper exercise and conducted training at an urban warfare training facility. Colonel Journey’s plan entailed training with the Iraqi police forces, building a constant presence in the city, and securing the populace from the insurgents. As with other Marine battalions deployed to Iraq, 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, used its Headquarters and Service Company to provide security and used mobile assault platoons to increase operational speed and reach. The Weapons Company’s 81mm Mortar Platoon conducted logistics convoys between ar-Ramadi and Camp Blue Diamond in Fallujah. To provide the battalion with both light and heavy quick-reaction force capabilities, Weapons Company platoons were attached to tanks from U.S. Army armor battalions. These included a mobile assault platoon with tanks from Company C, 1st Battalion, 77th Armor Regiment (U.S. Army), in October

and a mobile assault platoon attached to tanks from Company A, 2d Battalion, 37th Armor Regiment (U.S. Army), in November.⁵² The provisional task forces also relied on close air support provided by fixed-wing assets to destroy insurgent forces and positions. Another instance of Marine-Army cooperation occurred with the creation of route-clearing task forces utilizing elements from an Army engineer battalion and an explosive ordnance unit led by the Weapons Company commanding officer.⁵³

An overriding goal was to strengthen the authority of the central provincial administration by ensuring that the city would remain a stable and secure environment. Journey deployed his companies to various observation posts throughout the city.⁵⁴ His battalion conducted frequent foot patrols throughout the city, cleared IEDs, reduced rubble, and constructed new observation posts to facilitate security operations. The battalion immediately constructed a security station inside the city and commenced a series of operations against al-Qaeda. Through patrols, cordon-and-search operations, and offensive operations, the battalion methodically cleared the city of insurgent fighters. It faced persistent opposition from insurgent forces, and the security outposts that were built throughout the city were under almost constant attack in the form of small-arms fire, IEDs, rocket-propelled grenades, mortars, and explosive-laden trucks driving at full speed toward Marine positions.⁵⁵ The battalion responded with a number of operations. In November, Company A, Company C, and Weapons Company conducted Operation Makin Island III to clear the northern area of ar-Ramadi of insurgents. Other operations included Tinian, Midway Island, and Peleliu, and they were conducted by both Marines and Iraqi Army units. In December, the battalion was reinforced with elements of Battalion Landing Team 2/4 from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit. Alongside Iraqi soldiers and police, the Marines focused on clearing insurgents from further areas of the city.



Photo by LCpl Julian Billmair

MajGen Walter E. Gaskin (fourth from right), commanding general of II MEF(Fwd) and his deputy, MajGen John R. Allen (third from left), stand with a group of sheiks in ar-Ramadi in 2008. The Marine Corps campaign in al-Anbar depended on forging close alliances with local leaders as much as it did on firepower.

Originally planned as a three-day operation beginning 18 December 2006, it would last well into January due to the stubborn resistance of the al-Qaeda in Iraq forces.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the operations in December “yielded continued success in further integrating ISF (Iraqi Security Forces) into the task force’s Battalion combat operations.”⁵⁷

Iraqi Army companies became permanently partnered with Marine units.⁵⁸ Marines also worked closely with the police. The constant presence of Marines stationed in ar-Ramadi alongside Iraqis led to a significant shift in the operations against al-Qaeda in Iraq. As Colonel Jurney noted from ar-Ramadi in early 2005,

We have eight Marines who live in the police stations 24-7, which didn’t happen beforehand. When there’s time-sensitive

information that comes into a police station, which it does, there is a fleeting target of opportunity. Typically a police force couldn’t move on that because they’d be afraid they’d get shot by Coalition forces, at night, moving around. . . . Now with Marines living there 24-7, you know they’re going to pick up.⁵⁹

Most of the training given to Iraqi policemen was in the field during operations. As the battalion’s executive officer, Major Daniel R. Zappa, noted toward the end of the unit’s deployment, “When I say train, I don’t mean little academies where you’re teaching them to point their weapons in the right direction, they already know how to do that. I’m talking about partnership—living with them, operating with them, getting them operational.”⁶⁰ The need to build close working

relationships between Marines and local forces was thus a paramount goal of defeating the insurgency in ar-Ramadi.

Alongside combat operations against insurgents and partnering with the Iraqi police, the Marines of 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, also conducted civil-military operations to strengthen basic services in the city. The battalion's corpsmen provided medical services. In November 2006, the battalion and units of the Iraqi Army conducted Operation Berlin Airlift to provide basic provisions and food to the city. The operation entailed securing supply routes in order to deliver 200 bags of rice, 200 bags of flour, 40 bags of beans, and 1,600 bottles of water and oil.⁶¹

The overall concept of operations entailed conducting clear, hold, and build operations simultaneously.⁶² By the beginning of 2007, ar-Ramadi saw a significant drop in insurgent activity as al-Qaeda in Iraq was driven out of the city. The 1st Battalion, 6th Marines' operations in ar-Ramadi played a critical role in clearing the city of insurgents and securing the population. As with the operations of 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, in al-Qaim the previous year, the Marines of 1st Battalion, 6th Marines' tactics combined aggressive combat operations, a focus on training and partnering with Iraqi security forces, and maintaining a constant presence on the streets of the city. It built observation and security posts within the city, thus disrupting al-Qaeda in Iraq's freedom of maneuver. By remaining inside the city, it also helped to fortify the perception that its Marines were ready to put themselves at risk to protect the populace. The use of motorized mobile assault platoons also expanded the Marines' operation range. The attachment of armored assets from U.S. Army armor battalions and use of close air support also greatly expanded the battalion's firepower. Colonel Journey's counterinsurgency operations effectively utilized the full capabilities of the Marine infantry battalion. Similar operations took place throughout al-Anbar Province, and the year saw a dramatic drop

in the number of insurgent attacks throughout the region, after reaching a high point the previous year, from about 40 daily attacks the preceding fall to less than 10 by the end of the year. Thus, while 2007 would see some of the highest levels of violence in the war throughout the rest of Iraq, notably in the Baghdad area, the number of attacks would proceed on a downward trend throughout al-Anbar Province.⁶³ Both I and II MEF would continue to serve as the Multi-National Force-West until the beginning of 2010, by which point the Marine Corps had changed its focus to the war in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

While the Command and Staff College and Marine Corps Combat Development Command buttressed the focus on counterinsurgency and cultural anthropology within the Marine Corps' educational establishment, Marines in the field in Iraq and Afghanistan devised their own solutions to confronting the insurgencies there. These innovations were often devised and developed at the battalion level and down, as attested by the experiences and operations of units such as the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, in al-Qaim and the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, in ar-Ramadi. Although both battalions underwent revised versions of the CAX, their success in Iraq stemmed as much from keen situational awareness and common sense coupled with a commitment to be aggressive and bold when necessary. Consequently, the focus on maintaining the flexible, general-purpose character of Marine rifle battalions proved fortuitous. The focus helped prepare Marine units for a protean, often unpredictable environment that tested their full cognitive and combat skills. The versatility this training instilled within the units deploying to al-Anbar thus played an important role in laying the ground work for and fostering the creation of the Anbar Awakening and the ultimate neutralization of the al-Qaeda in Iraq insurgency in that province.

Conclusion

Marine Corps Institutional Culture and Training for Irregular Warfare

The Marine Corps did not undergo any kind of radical transformation as it trained and fought the Global War on Terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan. Instead, it adapted principles that had shaped and defined its warfighting mission throughout much of its history.

On the eve of the Global War on Terrorism, the Marine Corps had focused its attention on refining and improving its ability to serve as the United States' general-purpose contingency force. This post-Cold War Marine Corps sought to reconcile warfighting concepts, such as "maneuver warfare," with a world whose strategic balance of power had radically changed following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Marine leaders subsequently focused on preparing for short-term operations along the coastal regions of failed or potentially hostile states. Planners improved and refined the Corps' ability to rapidly deploy Marine air-ground task forces from amphibious ready groups and sustain those forces using the maritime prepositioning force.

Not only did this focus help provide the Marine Corps with a post-Cold War mission, but it also fit well with the Defense Department's efforts to streamline the military by increasing the speed with which units could deploy and the lethality and precision of the firepower they could bring to bear. These changes also meant that smaller combat formations could be utilized. Also of importance was the general assumption on the part of both the Department of Defense and the Marine Corps (as enshrined in *Fleet Marine Force Manual 1*) that future wars and operations would be short and have clear, decisive conclusions.

Operation Enduring Freedom, at least in its opening months, seemed to stand as convincing



Official Marine Corps History Division photo
Marines deployed to China during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. By the late nineteenth century, military theorists had largely accepted the idea that "small wars" or "irregular wars" were distinct from "big wars" or "regular wars." It was during this time that Marines became the U.S. Service most commonly associated with fighting "small wars" overseas.

evidence that U.S. planners had been correct in focusing on these transformation initiatives. In a matter of just a few months, U.S. Special Forces had successfully aligned themselves with resistance fighters and, with the assistance of precision-guided munitions from the air, successfully toppled the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. In the course of this operation, two Marine expeditionary units were successfully airlifted from a sea-based position and successfully seized a forward air base 300 miles from the shore in central Afghanistan. The

sudden collapse of the Taliban seemed to bring a quick and decisive end to the operation.

Thus, in the years immediately before the Iraq War, the Marine Corps' leadership saw little reason to dramatically alter how it prepared to fight future wars. As they prepared to participate in Operation Iraqi Freedom, the planners at I MEF envisioned a war similar to that in Afghanistan during which U.S. forces would quickly depose Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime and begin immediately withdrawing its forces. While Marines at the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory war-gamed postwar occupation operations, and while battalions from the 1st Marine Division participated in a range of stability operations during the months immediately after the fall of the Saddam regime, the bulk of I MEF returned to the United States in the summer and fall of 2003.

The secretary of defense's decision to deploy a Marine expeditionary force to western Iraq in 2004 marked the true beginning of the counterinsurgency renaissance within the Marine Corps. In preparation for this deployment, the 1st Marine Division commander, General Mattis, devised a range of counterinsurgency tactics and programs that he hoped to implement in Iraq's al-Anbar Province. While General Mattis' initial efforts were disrupted by the eruption of violence in Fallujah, Marine forces deploying in subsequent years made efforts to implement many of the 1st Marine Division's plans. In such places as Iraq's al-Anbar Province, Marine Corps units capably devised effective counterinsurgency tactics and strategies that helped reduce violence in what had been one of Iraq's most volatile and unstable provinces.

This successful adaptation can be attributed to three factors organic to the Marine Corps as an institution. First, the Marine Corps was already well-suited to fighting so-called small wars and insurgencies. It had a history conducting these types of operations in such countries as Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. It had

also developed doctrinal concepts for counterinsurgency, such as the Combined Action Program during the Vietnam War. The Corps' nature as a general-purpose air-ground expeditionary force comprised of primarily light, mobile riflemen also made it an ideal service for conducting the wide range of missions included within counterinsurgency operations. When Marine battalions deployed to Iraq in 2003, they were able to conduct stability operations even though they had little preparation for these specific types of missions. As the Iraq insurgency erupted and Marines returned in 2004, Marine commanders in the field devised new measures to combat the insurgent forces, such as reintroducing the CAP. In al-Qaim and ar-Ramadi, Marine battalion commanders deployed their companies and platoons into the major urban areas to ensure that Marines both lived with the populace and could gather intelligence. They also worked alongside local Iraqis, most notably tribal sheikhs, and helped forge the alliance against the insurgency, known as the Anbar Awakening.

The second factor was the Marine Corps' small size. This made it a highly adaptive institution in which lessons were quickly transmitted among its officers and noncommissioned officers. Battalion commanders preparing their Marines for deployment could easily consult with comrades who had already led battalions and companies during earlier months. The Corps' small size also meant training was easily centralized. All Marine battalions deploying to Iraq underwent some version of the CAX and later Exercise Mojave Viper at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center at Twentynine Palms in California before their tours. Thus, the Marine Corps Combat Development Command could quickly adapt the exercises to conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan, drawing on the experiences of Marine Corps units that had already deployed. The Corps' small size also meant that it was easier for the expeditionary force and division commanders to transmit their aims and goals for each



Official Department of Defense photo MajGen Alexander A. Vandegrift (front row, fourth from left), commander of the 1st Marine Division, and his staff at Guadalcanal in 1942. This image is a testament to the close-knit nature of the Marine Corps and the strong influence this has played in its history. Of the 40 Marines pictured in this photo, 23 would become general officers and 3 (including Vandegrift) would become Commandant of the Marine Corps.

campaign and make it clear what they hoped to achieve and how they planned to achieve it.

The third factor was the Marine Corps' education and training establishment's ability to institute a number of important changes to its course of instruction and training exercises. These helped to strengthen the abilities of officers to fight insurgencies. As successful as Marine units were in the field, the Marine Corps' training commands also realized that they could provide more concrete and detailed education and training in small wars and counterinsurgency. As the commander of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command, General Amos, acknowledged in 2007, "Marines have always engaged in activities and operations requiring nonkinetic military capabilities. However, these capabilities have not normally been among our strengths."¹ It was one thing to stress that Marines needed to be able to fight a three-

block war, simultaneously conducting stability operations, humanitarian assistance, and combat operations in a single conflict. But such an approach required providing Marines with the appropriate tools for conducting such diverse operations.

This often meant shifting the focus of training and education away from the traditional emphasis on amphibious landings and introducing training in small wars, anthropology, culture, and language to Marine officers. The curriculum at the Command and Staff College was rebalanced to provide more course hours on counterinsurgency, small wars, cultural anthropology, languages, and the political and social history of the Middle East. Marine Corps Combat Development Command created new centers, such as the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning and the Center for Irregular Warfare, to ensure Marines received specialized training

and to help build a cadre of experts who could advise and assist. Change did not just occur in the education of field grade officers, however. The Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center at Twentynine Palms adapted the annual combined-armed exercises into Mojave Viper to provide Marines preparing to deploy to Iraq and Afghanistan with a realistic training program designed to hone their skills operating in a densely populated, urban environment.

In 2009, a Marine air-ground task force deployed to Afghanistan. Constituting the most substantial Marine Corps deployment to Operation Enduring Freedom since Task Force 58's insertion in 2001, Task Force Leatherneck was sent to the most troubled and hostile region of the country, southern Helmand Province. There, Marines drew on lessons learned in Iraq as they

participated in NATO's multinational assistance force's overall counterinsurgency campaign.²

At the same time, the newly elected Barack H. Obama administration made a concerted effort to shift American strategic priorities to the Pacific. In 2010, the newly appointed Commandant, General Amos, reaffirmed this shift as he sought to reorient the Marine Corps toward amphibious operations in a region long considered the Marine Corps' region of responsibility.³ General Amos also affirmed that the Corps' principal mission was to continue serving as America's expeditionary force-in-readiness. Thus, as the second decade of the twenty-first century began, the Marine Corps once again found itself in familiar territory as it prepared and trained to conduct a wide variety of missions and fight wars of differing type and character.

Notes

Introduction

1. Chad C. Serena, *A Revolution in Military Adaptation: The U.S. Army in the Iraq War* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011); David Cloud and Greg Jaffe, *The Fourth Star: Four Generals and the Epic Struggle for the Future of the United States Army* (New York: Crown, 2009); Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006–2008* (New York: Penguin, 2009); John Arquilla, *Worst Enemy: The Reluctant Transformation of the American Military* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008); James D. Campbell, *Making Riflemen from Mud: Restoring the Army's Culture of Irregular Warfare* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007); and Frederick Kagan, *Finding the Target: The Transformation of American Military Policy* (New York: Encounter Books, 2006).
2. This revolution and transformation should not be confused with the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs. That concept, dating to the Cold War, focused on how new technologies allowed for more precise use of fires, better acquisition of intelligence, and greater force protection. Adherents of this theory of military revolution posited that these innovations radically redefined how wars and battles were fought. Operation Desert Storm's speed seemed to bear out this prediction, while the Afghanistan and Iraq wars seemed to stand as evidence that America's enemies were already devising asymmetric means for countering its technological superiority. See Steven Metz and James Kievit, *Strategy and the Revolution in Military Affairs: From Theory to Policy*, Army War College Report, 27 June 1995, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ssi/stratrma.pdf>; John B. Alexander, *Future War: Non-Lethal Weapons in Twenty-First Century Warfare* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 1999); John Arquilla and David F. Ronfeldt, eds., *In Athena's Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age* (Saint Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1997); and Donald Kagan and Frederick Kagan, *While America Sleeps: Self-Delusion, Military Weakness and the Threat to Peace Today* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000).
3. For an example, see Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin, 2006); and John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*, foreword by Gen Peter J. Schoomaker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).
4. The primary theater combatant command for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.
5. The question of how military organizations change and innovate has long been a subject of interest to scholars of the military. Political scientists, such as Samuel P. Huntington and Stephen P. Rosen, argue that doctrinal change is motivated from within military organizations. In contrast, such analysts as Barry R. Posen and Steven van Evera cast militaries as interdependent organizations linked to their civilian governments. While it also sees them as insular organizations, this school argues that militaries are reticent to change and only conceive new doctrine when pressured to do so by their civilian overseers. Meanwhile, scholars, such as Richard Duncan Downie and Elizabeth Kier, have contended that a complex range of different factors come together to effect change in military doctrine. Downie argues that change occurs when external conditions align with a military's level of institutional learning and expertise. When these two conditions are met, a military will promulgate some form of doctrinal change. Consequently, military transformation proceeds from what societies in general and military institutions in particular perceive as potential threats. See Richard Duncan Downie, *Learning from Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998); Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1957); Stephen P. Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Kimberly Marten Zisk, *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovation, 1955–1991* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); and Steven van Evera, "The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War," *International Security* 9, no. 1 (1984): 58–107.
6. Terry Terriff, "Innovate or Die: Organizational Culture and the Origins of Maneuver Warfare in the United States Marine Corps," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29, no. 3 (2006): 475–503.
7. Col Thomas G. Roe, Maj Ernest H. Giusti, Maj John H. Johnstone, and Benis M. Frank, *A History of Marine Corps*

Roles and Mission, 1775–1962 (Washington, DC: HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1962); Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*, rev. ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1991); and Jack Shulimson, *The Marine Corps' Search for a Mission, 1880–1898* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993).

8. Gordon Keiser, *The Marine Corps and Defense Unification, 1944–47* (Baltimore: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1996). See also Victor H. Krulak, *First to Fight: An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps* (New York: Pocket Books, 1991), 17–79; and Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 445–74.

9. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*; Jack Shulimson, *The Marine Corps' Search for a Mission*; and Terry Terriff, “Innovate or Die.”

10. Krulak, *First to Fight*, 81–122; Keith B. Bickel, *Mars Learning: The Marine Corps' Development of Small Wars Doctrine, 1915–1940* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001); and Millett, *Semper Fidelis*.

11. Bickel, *Mars Learning*, 205; Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 263.

12. Krulak, *First to Fight*.

13. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 263. As Millett notes, “By the time the last troops came home from Haiti and Nicaragua, the Marine Corps was glad to accept the verdict that it had more useful things to do.”

14. Terriff, “Innovate or Die.”

15. *Warfighting, Fleet Marine Force Manual 1* of 1989, which codified the principles of maneuver, mechanization, and speed, was the culminating point of a nearly two decade-long development within the Marine Corps as it trained to participate in a conventional war with the Soviet Union. See U.S. Marine Corps, *Warfighting, Fleet Marine Force Manual 1* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 1989), hereafter *Warfighting*.

16. This waxing and waning of interest in irregular warfare was not unique to the Marine Corps and was shared by the rest of the U.S. military. Scholar Wray R. Johnson likens this ebb and flow of interest to a sine wave moving through American military history. See Wray R. Johnson, “Doctrine for Irregular Warfare: Déjà Vu All Over Again?,” *Marine Corps University Journal* 2, no. 1 (2011): 35–65.

17. Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege* (Berlin: Dümmlers Verlag, 1832), book 7, chapter 26. See also John T. Sumida, *Decoding Clausewitz: A New Approach to On War* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2011).

18. Douglas Porch, “The Dangerous Myths and Dubious Promise of COIN,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 22, no. 2 (2011): 239–57.

19. C. E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, rev. ed. (1896; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 21.

20. U.S. Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1940); and Johnson, “Doctrine for Irregular Warfare,” 41.

21. *Small Wars Manual*, 1–1.

22. Current Joint doctrine defines insurgency as the “organized use of subversion and violence by a group or movement that seeks to overthrow or force change of a governing authority” and counterinsurgency as “comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to defeat an insurgency and to address any core grievances.” See Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 8 November 2010, as amended through 15 November 2011), http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/dod_dictionary/.

23. Johnson, “Doctrine for Irregular Warfare,” 45–48.

24. *Ibid.*, 50–56.

25. Frank G. Hoffman, “Striking a Balance: Posturing the Future Force for COIN and Conventional Warfare,” *Armed Forces Journal* (July 2009), <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2009/07/4099782/>.

26. See Mark Moyer, *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

Chapter 1

1. For information on the Barbary Wars, see Glen Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder: The Barbary Wars and the Birth of the U.S. Navy* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963). For a good overview of Marine Corps landings before World War II, see Capt Harry Allanson Ellsworth, *One Hundred Eighty Landings of the United States Marines, 1800–1934* (Washington, DC: Hist&Mus Div, HQMC, 1974).

2. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 70–72.

3. Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1860–1941* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2003); and Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War, 1899–1902* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002).

4. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 148–49.

5. Millett provides a good overview of the wars of intervention, or Banana Wars, in *Semper Fidelis*, 178–211 and 236–63. For more on the era of interventions, see D. A. Graber, *Crisis Diplomacy: A History of U.S. Intervention Policies and Practices* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1959); Bruce Calder, *The Impact of Intervention: The Dominican Republic During the U.S. Occupation, 1916–*

- 1924 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984); Lester D. Langley, *The Banana Wars: An Inner History of American Empire, 1900–1934* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983); Ivan Musicant, *The Banana Wars: A History of United States Military Intervention in Latin America from the Spanish-American War to the Invasion of Panama* (New York: Macmillan, 1990); Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915–1934* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1971); and David Healy, *Gunboat Diplomacy in the Wilson Era: The U.S. Navy in Haiti, 1915–1916* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976).
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7. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 211; and Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915–1934*, 105–21.
8. Smedley D. Butler, “America’s Armed Forces 2: ‘In Time of Peace’: The Army,” *Common Sense*, November 1935.
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10. Callwell, *Small Wars*, 21.
11. *Ibid.*, 75.
12. U.S. Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual* (1940), 6–4. Italicization is the author’s. In light of the various editions of the manual in print, all citations include chapter and paragraph to avoid confusion.
13. Callwell, *Small Wars*, 78.
14. U.S. Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual*, 1–1.
15. *Ibid.*, 1–2.
16. *Ibid.*, 1–7.
17. *Ibid.*, 1–16.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, 1–31.
20. *Ibid.*, 1–2.
21. Operation Chromite, the landing at Inchon conducted during the Korean War, would prove to be the exception to the rule, and was the last forced entry utilizing a corps-size assault force conducted by the United States. See Adrian Lewis, *The American Culture of War: The History of U.S. Military Force from World War II to Operation Iraqi Freedom* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2007), 181.
22. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 454; and LtCol Eugene W. Rawlings, *The Marines and Helicopters, 1946–1962* (Washington, DC: Hist&Mus Div, HQMC, 1976), 20–21.
23. Jeffrey G. Barlow, *The Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight for Naval Aviation, 1945–1950* (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center, 1994).
24. Ingo Tauschweizer, *The Cold War U.S. Army: Building Deterrence for Limited War* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2009), 120–22.
25. Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy’s Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Philip Nash, “Bear Any Burden? John F. Kennedy and Nuclear Weapons,” in *The Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb: Nuclear Diplomacy since 1945*, eds., John Lewis Gaddis et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 120–40; and Michael Beschloss, *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1960–1963* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1991).
26. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, foreword by Gen Peter J. Schoomaker.
27. Jack Shulimson, *Marines in Lebanon 1958* (Washington, DC: HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1966).
28. Testimony of Gen David. M. Shoup, House Armed Services Committee Hearings, “Defense Appropriations FY 1964,” quoted in Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 548–49.
29. U.S. Marine Corps, *Operations Against Guerrilla Forces, Fleet Marine Force Manual 21* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 1962), 25, hereafter *Operations Against Guerrilla Forces*. See also Johnson, “Doctrine on Irregular Warfare,” 1.
30. U.S. Marine Corps, *Operations Against Guerrilla Forces*, 46.
31. *Ibid.*, foreword.
32. Introduction to the Sunflower Press edition of the *United States Marine Corps Small Wars Manual* (Manhattan, KS: Sunflower University Press, 1996), xii; Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 48; and Jon T. Hoffman, “Small Wars Manual,” *The War of 1898 and U.S. Interventions: An Encyclopedia*, ed., Benjamin R. Beede (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1994), 515.
33. *U.S. Marines in Guerrilla and Anti-Guerrilla Type Operations*, Marine Corps History Division Reference Branch Subject Files, Counterinsurgency and Guerrilla Warfare, Marine Corps Historical Center (MCHC), Quantico, VA.
34. *Ibid.*

35. LtCol Bruce F. Meyers, "Student Individual Research Project AY 1963–64," Marine Corps History Division Reference Branch Subject Files, Counterinsurgency and Guerrilla Warfare, MCHC, Quantico, VA.
36. *Ibid.*, 3.
37. Among the articles in the January 1962 issue were Peter Paret, "Guerrilla War and U.S. Military Policy: A Study"; W. W. Rostow, "Guerrilla Warfare in Underdeveloped Areas"; Michael Spark, "Guerrillas, Small Wars, and Marines"; and "Mao's Primer on Guerrilla Warfare." All in *Marine Corps Gazette* 46, no. 1 (1962). These articles and others were published in LtCol T. N. Greene, ed., *The Guerrilla and How to Fight Him: Selections from the Marine Corps Gazette* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962).
38. Spark, "Guerrillas, Small Wars, and Marines," 251.
39. *Ibid.*, 259.
40. The story is related in a letter to *Marine Corps Gazette* written in 1988 by the journal's editor in 1962, LtCol Thomas N. Greene. See "Critiquing Low-Intensity Conflict," *Marine Corps Gazette* 72, no. 7 (1988): 30.
41. MajGen Victor H. Krulak, Col David Galula, and G. K. Tanham, "Counter-insurgency: Fighting the Abstract War," *Marine Corps Gazette* 47, no. 1 (1963): 25.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*, 26.
44. *Ibid.*, 27.
45. *Ibid.*, 567; and Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 151–87.
46. III Marine Amphibious Force was the principal Marine headquarters in Vietnam from 1965 to 1971. Originally designated III MEF, the air-ground task force comprised two divisions, an aircraft wing, and supporting units. The term "expeditionary" was changed to "amphibious" due to the fact that the French colonial forces in Indochina had been called French Expeditionary Corps.
47. Jack Shulimson and Maj Charles M. Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Landing and the Build Up, 1965* (Washington, DC: Hist&Mus Div, HQMC, 1978), 134.
48. *Ibid.*, 133–34.
49. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 574–90.
50. *Ibid.*, 552.
51. Terriff, "Innovate or Die," 488.
52. The dilemma was summarized in a Brookings Institution report published in 1976. See Anthony Binkin and Jeffrey Record, *Where Does the Marine Corps Go From Here?* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1976).
53. For an overview of Army doctrine for defending Europe against the Warsaw Pact during the 1970s and 1980s, see Trauschweizer, *The Cold War U.S. Army*, 195–229.
54. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 609.
55. Terriff, "Innovate or Die," 495–96; Capt Stephen W. Miller, "It's Time to Mechanize Amphibious Forces," *Marine Corps Gazette* 62, no. 7 (1978): 39–42; Capt Stephen W. Miller, "Winning Through Maneuver: Part I-Countering the Offense," *Marine Corps Gazette* 63, no. 10 (1979): 28–36; Capt Stephen W. Miller, "Winning Through Maneuver: Conclusion: Countering the Defense," *Marine Corps Gazette* 63, no. 12 (1979): 57–63; William S. Lind, "Defining Maneuver Warfare for the Marine Corps," *Marine Corps Gazette* 64, no. 3 (1980): 55–58; William S. Lind, "Proposing Some New Models for Marine Mechanized Units," *Marine Corps Gazette* 62, no. 9 (1978): 34–38; and William S. Lind, *Maneuver Warfare Handbook* (Boulder, CO: Westview Special Studies in Military Affairs, 1985).
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57. *Ibid.*, 60.
58. *Ibid.*, 77.
59. John L. Romjue, *From Active Defense to AirLand Battle: The Development of Army Doctrine, 1973–1982* (Fort Monroe, VA: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, Historical Office, 1984).
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64. Maj Paul Melshen, "Taking on Low-Intensity Conflicts," *Marine Corps Gazette* 71, no. 1 (1987): 44–45.
65. Michael H. Decker, "The MAGTF and Low-Intensity Conflict," *Marine Corps Gazette* 72, no. 3 (1988): 45–47.
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69. Major T. X. Hammes, "Insurgency: The Forgotten Threat," *Marine Corps Gazette* 72, no. 3 (1988): 40–44.

70. Ibid., 40.
71. Ibid., 41.
72. Ibid., 43.
73. Ibid., 44.
74. William S. Lind, Col Keith Nightingale, USA, Capt John F. Schmitt, Col Joseph W. Sutton, USA, and LtCol Gary I. Wilson, "The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation," *Marine Corps Gazette* 73, no. 10 (1989): 22–26.
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76. Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).
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Chapter 2

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2. U.S. Marine Corps Combat Assessment Team, *Operation Enduring Freedom Summary Report*, 2002, Files of Training and Education Command, Gray Research Center (GRC), Quantico, VA, 61, hereafter *OEF Summary Report*.
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7. U.S. Marine Corps, *Concepts and Issues 2001* (Washington, DC: HQMC, Programs and Resources Department, 2001), 15.
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9. U.S. Marine Corps, *Operational Maneuver from the Sea*.
10. Ibid.
11. *Expeditionary Maneuver Warfare*, A-4.
12. U.S. Marine Corps, *Concepts and Issues 2001*, 200–3.
13. Ibid., 202.
14. During the first months of Operation Enduring Freedom, for example, the 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade was comprised of two Marine expeditionary units, the 15th MEU(SOC) and the 26th MEU(SOC).
15. I MEF is based in California and Arizona, II MEF is based in North Carolina and South Carolina, and the forward-deployed III MEF is based in Okinawa and Hawaii.
16. U.S. Marine Corps, *Concepts and Issues 2001*, 203.
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18. A recent article by William F. Owen presents a thorough analysis of the maneuver warfare doctrine and criticizes most of its basic assumptions. See William F. Owen, "The Manoeuvre Warfare Fraud," *Royal United Services Institute* 153, no. 4 (2008): 62–67. Reprinted in *Small Wars Journal* and available at www.smallwarsjournal.com.
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The idea that MW and Attrition are either separate styles or part of a spectrum does not stand analysis. While the selective use of examples by MW adherents has sought to prove them as opposing or differing styles, they are better explained as complimentary. They are in no way distinct or alternative forms of warfare. Success in battle is based on breaking the enemies' will to resist. There are well-recognised fundamentals to this activity on which most military doctrine is based. These fundamentals were clearly articulated by Henri Jomini, Carl von Clausewitz, Ardant Du Picq, and Ferdinand Foch, and great many others. Whether intentional or accidental, the advocacy of MW is based on the selective use of examples, altered definitions, and some deliberate misrepresentation." See Owen, "The Manoeuvre Warfare Fraud," www.smallwarsjournal.com.

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