

# Lesson 6

## The United States Marine Corps



### Key Terms

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Marine Air Ground Task Force  
Marine Expeditionary Unit  
Marine Expeditionary Brigade  
Marine Expeditionary Force  
Maritime Prepositioned Squadron  
Noncombatant Evacuation Operation  
Vertical Envelopment  
Operational Maneuver from the Sea

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### What You Will Learn to Do

- Explore the organization and mission of the U.S. Marine Corps

### Linked Core Abilities

- Do your share as a good citizen in your school, community, country, and the world

### Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- Describe the organization of the U.S. Marine Corps
- Explain the mission of the U.S. Marine Corps
- Explain the combined arms organization of the U.S. Marine Corps and how it makes the Marines unique
- Identify the Marine Corps Elements of Combat Power
- Describe the two operational specialties of the U.S. Marines
- Define the key words contained in this lesson

# Chapter 2

## Introduction

“First to Fight,” the U.S. Marine Corps organizes, trains, and equips a force in readiness to respond in crisis and conduct prompt military action. Operational units are forward deployed and assigned to designated Unified Combatant Commands to conduct expeditionary and amphibious operations at the direction of the president of the United States. In this lesson, you learn about the U.S. Marine Corps—its origins, mission, and organization.

## The United States Marine Corps

The U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) was founded on November 10, 1775, by an act of the Continental Congress authorizing two battalions of Marines to provide “soldiers of the sea.” The USMC provides Fleet Marine Forces for service with the fleet in the seizure or defense of advanced naval bases and for the conduct of such land operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign. The USMC also provides detachments and organizations for service on armed vessels of the Navy. The official seal of the U.S. Marine Corps is shown in Figure 2.6.1.

## Organization

The U.S. Marine Corps is subordinate to the Department of the Navy. The Commandant of the Marine Corps is directly responsible to the Secretary of the Navy for the administration, discipline, organization, training, and readiness of the Marine Corps. The Commandant of the Marine Corps directs a Supporting Establishment composed of 15 major bases and stations in the United States and Japan that recruit, organize, train, equip, and support Marine Operating Forces. Marine Operating Forces include Marine Security Guards, Marine Corps Security Forces,

*Figure 2.6.1: The official seal of the U.S. Marine Corps.*

Courtesy of the US Department of Defense.



and Marine Forces. Marine Security Guards provide embassy security for 121 diplomatic posts in 115 countries. Marine Corps Security Forces protect naval installations. Marine Forces are assigned to Marine Forces Atlantic (MARFORLANT), Marine Forces Pacific (MAFORPAC), and Marine Forces Reserve (MAFORRES). The Marine Corps Reserve provides trained units and qualified individuals to be mobilized for active duty in times of war, national emergency, or contingency operations. Marine Forces Atlantic provides combat-ready Marine Forces to the U.S. Joint Forces Command. Marine Force Pacific provides combat-ready Marine Forces to the U.S. Pacific Command. Marine forces are apportioned to the remaining geographic commands for contingency planning and are provided when directed by the Secretary of Defense.

### **Marine Corps Philosophy**

The U.S. Marine Corps is smallest among the four uniform services. Because it depends on the Department of the Navy for its budget, it is protected by law to ensure it maintains a force in readiness of at least corps strength. To maximize its operational capability, the Marine Corps operates on the principle “Every Marine a Rifleman.” Every Marine attends the Marine Corps Basic School and qualifies as a marksman.

### **Task Organization**

The U.S. Marine Corps is organized to make itself uniquely light and lethal. Every Marine unit is conceptually organized into a **Marine Air Ground Task Force** combining air and ground combat elements into a seamless operation. The MAGTF includes a Command Element (CE), Ground Combat Element (GCE), Air Combat Element (ACE), and Combat Service Support (CSS) element. The Air Combat Element provides mobility and firepower to the Ground Combat Element. Airlift elements rapidly deploy Marines into battle, maneuver them into a position of advantage, and redeploy them to exploit the enemy. Attack elements provide essential fire support, acting like flying artillery to eliminate the burden of carrying heavy weapons into battle. The MAGTF concept maximizes combined arms effectiveness and makes the U.S. Marine Corps light, lethal, and mobile on the battlefield.

### **Elements of Marine Combat Power**

MARFORLANT and MARFORPAC are task organized into Marine Expeditionary Forces, Marine Expeditionary Brigades, and Marine Expeditionary Units.

### **Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU)**

The **Marine Expeditionary Unit** is the smallest combat unit composed of approximately 2,200 Marines. A MEU is a standard forward-deployed Marine expeditionary organization deployed as an Amphibious Ready Group (ARG). A MEU is a self-contained operating force capable of missions of limited scope and duration. The Air Combat Element is a squadron-size unit, and the Ground Combat Element is a battalion-size force. A MEU typically deploys with 15 days sustainment.

#### **Key Note Term**

**Marine Air Ground Task Force** – organizational concept that makes the Marines uniquely light and lethal

#### **Key Note Term**

**Marine Expeditionary Unit** – smallest combat organization, forward deployed with the amphibious ready group

**Key Note Term**

**Marine Expeditionary Brigade** – combat organization constituted from Maritime Prepositioned Squadrons

**Key Note Term**

**Marine Expeditionary Force** – largest combat organization composed of a Marine Division and Marine Air Wing

**Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB)**

The **Marine Expeditionary Brigade** is an intermediate-size combat unit composed of approximately 16,500 Marines. A MEB is a crisis response force capable of forcible entry and enabling the introduction of follow-on forces. The MEB is not a standing organization but is rather embedded within the MEF. A MEB is capable of rapid deployment either by air, in combination with Maritime Prepositioned Squadrons (MPS), or by amphibious shipping. The Air Combat Element is a group-size unit, and the Ground Combat Element is a brigade-size force. A MEB is self-sustaining for 30 days.

**Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF)**

A **Marine Expeditionary Force** is the largest combat unit composed of approximately 42,000 Marines that can be quickly deployed in times of crisis. The Air Combat element is a Marine Air Wing, and the Ground Combat Element is a Marine Division. The MEF typically deploys with 60 days sustainment.

**Marine Corps Operations**

The U.S. Marine Corps provides a force in readiness prepared to respond at the direction of the president to crisis and contingencies around the world (see Figure 2.6.2). The unique capabilities that make the Marines “First to Fight” are that they’re forward deployed, expeditionary by design, special operations capable, and amphibious specialists.

**Forward Deployed**

Marine Expeditionary Units are forward deployed near hot spots of the globe aboard Amphibious Ready Groups. The Amphibious Ready Group is a fleet of ships specially modified to carry Marine forces and support Marine amphibious opera-

*Figure 2.6.2: The U.S. Marines are ready to respond at the direction of the president.*

Courtesy of Jim McDonald/Corbis Images.



tions. The Amphibious Ready Group is commanded by a naval officer at sea but falls under Marine control once command is established ashore during amphibious operations. The Amphibious Ready Group puts Marines in the thick of action whenever crises flare around the world and makes the U.S. Marines Corps America's "911" reaction force, the first to respond to emergencies. The following sections describe the Amphibious Ready Group.

### ***Amphibious Assault Ship***

The Amphibious Assault Ship carries Marines, equipment, landing craft, and aircraft into battle. About the size of a World War II aircraft carrier, the Amphibious Assault Ship doesn't have a catapult system, so it can't launch fixed wing aircraft. Only vertical takeoff and landing aircraft can operate from its deck including helicopters, Harriers, and Ospreys. Depending on mission, the Amphibious Assault Ship can carry 2,000 Marines, 35 aircraft, and 7 landing craft. Marines board landing craft inside the relative safety of the Well Deck, which opens to the sea and allows water to come into the ship. All ships of the Amphibious Ready Group have a Well Deck.

### ***Amphibious Transport Dock***

The Amphibious Transport Dock carries Marines, equipment, and amphibious assault vehicles. The Amphibious Transport Dock has a small flight deck capable of managing helicopter operations from the stern. Depending on mission, the Amphibious Transport Dock can carry 800 Marines, 6 helicopters, and 24 amphibious assault vehicles. The amphibious assault vehicles launch from the ship's Well Deck.

### ***Dock Landing Ship***

The Dock Landing Ship carries Marines, equipment, and amphibious landing craft. The Dock Landing Ship has a small flight deck capable of managing helicopter operations from the stern. Depending on mission, the Amphibious Transport Dock can carry 330 Marines and 3 Landing Craft Air Cushions in its cavernous Well Deck.

### ***Expeditionary Design***

The U.S. Marine Corps is said to be expeditionary because of its capability to rapidly deploy anywhere around the world (if it's not already there), and its capability to sustain combat operations in deployed locations. Marine forces are highly mobile and deployable exactly because they don't carry a lot of heavy equipment. Marines offset their disadvantage in heavy ground forces with airpower.

A Marine Expeditionary Unit is completely self-contained and carries all of its equipment aboard the Amphibious Readiness Group. When put ashore, a Marine Expeditionary Unit carries sufficient supplies to sustain itself for 15 days.

To sustain operations beyond 15 days, or to land a Marine Expeditionary Brigade or Marine Expeditionary Force, the U.S. Marine Corps relies on **Maritime Prepositioned Squadrons (MPS)**. A Maritime Prepositioned Squadron is a small flotilla of cargo ships stationed at sea close to the hot spots of the world. The flotilla comprises a floating warehouse of military equipment and stores sufficient to land a small force or resupply a large one. The MPS is a means to rapidly mass decisive force against an enemy. An MPS can pull into a port of call and off-load its cargo within 6 days, compared to 30 days if it had to sail from the United States. Marines are

#### ***Key Note Term***

**Maritime Prepositioned Squadron** – small flotilla of cargo ships stationed close to hot spots of the world

flowed into port and pick up their combat gear. The three MPSs are located in Mediterranean, Indian, and Pacific waters. A single MPS can constitute a MEB and support it for 30 days. All three MPSs together can constitute a MEF.

### *Special Operations Capable*

The U.S. Marine Corps prides itself on being able to conduct special missions and is frequently called on to conduct **Noncombatant Evacuation Operations**, rescuing U.S. citizens and allies from foreign combat zones. A Marine Expeditionary Unit has a large contingent of transport helicopters to safely airlift noncombatants from a foreign combat zone under permissive conditions. A Marine Expeditionary Unit also carries a large contingent of attack aircraft and specialized amphibious vehicles to evacuate noncombatants from a foreign combat zone under hostile or non-permissive conditions.

### *Amphibious Specialty*

Central to the U.S. Marine Corps mission is the ability to conduct amphibious operations and establish a foothold, or lodgment, in enemy territory. The U.S. Marine Corps conducts a **Vertical Envelopment** flanking or surrounding the enemy using air, ground, and surface assets to strike from multiple directions at once.

Marine forces employ **Operational Maneuver from the Sea** to mask their movements and synchronize attacks. The Amphibious Readiness Group deploys amphibious Marine forces at sea, beyond enemy observation, and then repositions to mislead the enemy and prepare a supporting air assault.

Vertical Envelopment and Operational Maneuver from the Sea enhance Marine combat effectiveness by catching the enemy by surprise and striking at his weakness.

### *Conclusion*

The U.S. Marine Corps is subordinate to the Department of the Navy. The Commandant of the Marine Corps reports directly to the Secretary of the Navy. The Commandant of the Marine Corps directs Supporting Establishments and Marine Operating Forces. The Marine Operating Forces are organized into Marine Forces Atlantic and Marine Forces Pacific. All Marine units are organized into Marine Air Ground Task Forces integrating air and ground combat elements. The MAGTF con-

#### *Key Note Term*

**Noncombatant Evacuation Operation** – specialized Marine mission to rescue civilians from combat zones

#### *Key Note Terms*

**Vertical Envelopment** – to flank or surround the enemy using air, ground, and surface assets all at once

**Operational Maneuver from the Sea** – using the ocean as maneuver space to surprise the enemy

cept makes the Marines uniquely light and lethal because they use their airpower as flying artillery, relieving them of carrying a lot of heavy equipment. The result is that the Marines can be forward deployed and respond quickly to crises around the globe. Marine Forces are organized into Marine Expeditionary Units, Marine Expeditionary Brigades, and Marine Expeditionary Forces using the MAGTF concept. The largest tactical unit is the MEF. The MEF is composed of a Marine Air Wing and Marine Division. The smallest tactical unit is the MEU. The Marines of a MEU are forward deployed aboard an Amphibious Ready Group. The ships of the ARG can carry Marines and their equipment into battle. A MEU can deploy and sustain itself up to 15 days in battle. To conduct longer operations requires the larger force of the MEB or resupply from Maritime Prepositioned Squadrons. MPSs are floating warehouses of Marine equipment which can pull into nearby ports within six days. The U.S. Marines specialize in amphibious and expeditionary operations. The Marines deploy aboard the ARG and conduct Operational Maneuver From the Sea to surprise the enemy as to the time and location of an attack. The Marines employ the combat power of the ARG to vertically envelop the enemy and attack where he is weakest.

In the following lesson, you will learn about the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Merchant Marine and their places within the U.S. military.

## Lesson Review

1. What is the relation between the Marine Corps and the Department of the Navy?
2. What is the mission of the U.S. Marine Corps?
3. What is a MAGTF and how does it make the Marines unique?
4. What are the three basic tactical units of the Marines?