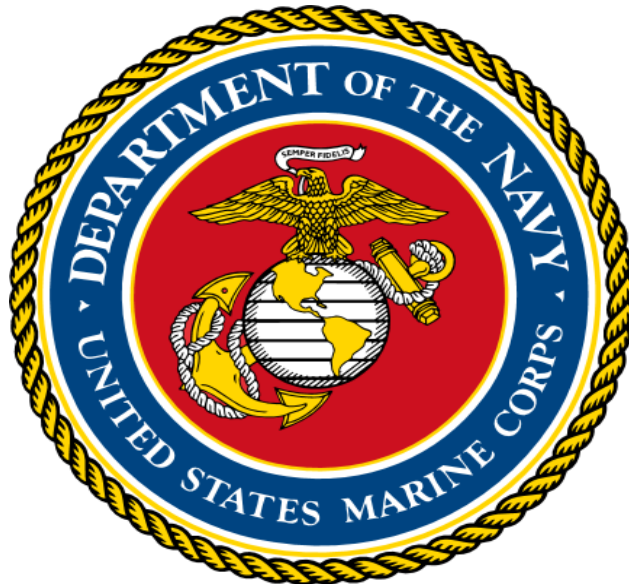


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August 2021



US Marine Corps Deployment Strategy: 1775–2016

Peter M. Swartz

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Abstract

This annotated briefing, originally drafted in 2016, summarizes the history of the United States Marine Corps' deployment strategy, beginning with the 1775 establishment of the USMC as a guard for Navy ships and as a nascent expeditionary force. It also highlights the historical roles of the USMC as US Embassy guard detachments, as response units in US domestic crises, and as crisis response units for noncombatant evacuation operations and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief missions worldwide. The briefing concludes with a summary comparison of US Navy and USMC deployment strategies.

The content of this paper is current through 2016.

Distribution

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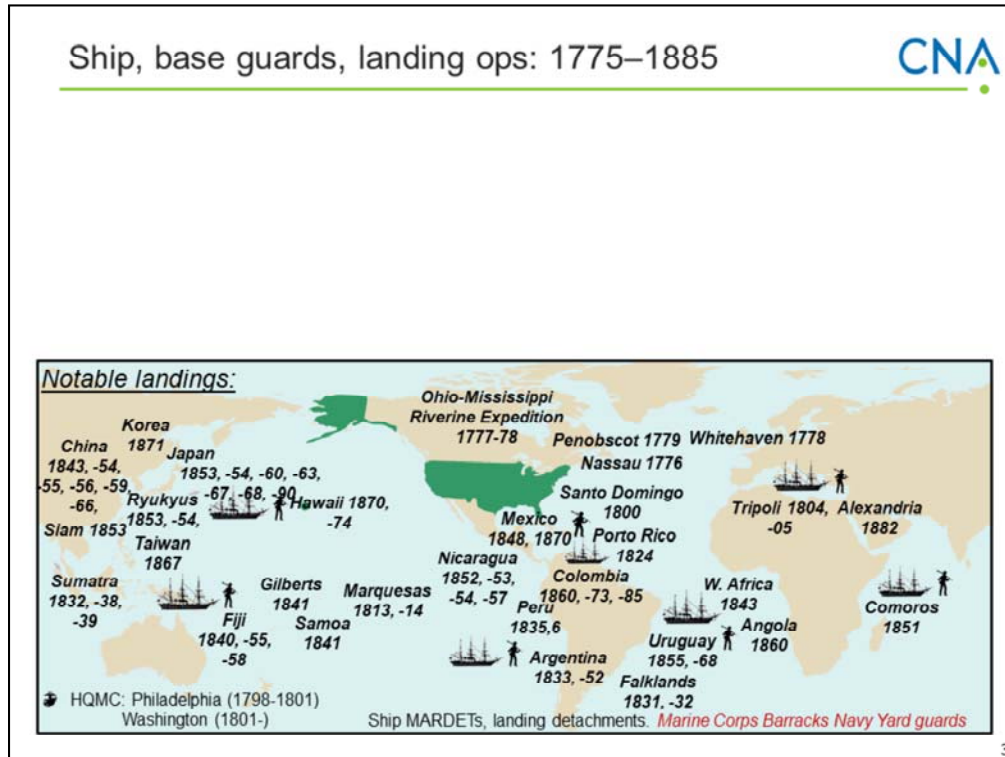
USMC deployment eras (I)



- 1775–1885: Ship, base guards; forward landing operations; ops alongside the Army
- 1885–98: Surge added to forward presence
- 1898–1902: Growing, fighting, planning
- 1902–14: Expeditionary ops, advanced-base plans
- 1915–17: Occupying, training, fighting in small wars
- 1917–19: Growth and major ground and air combat
- 1919–33: Small-war ops and amphibious plans
- 1933–39: Focus on amphibious assaults
- 1939–41: Expansive growth; deploy to defend bases
- 1941–43: Grow, lose, hold, counter, advance
- 1943–46: Grow, seize, conquer, occupy

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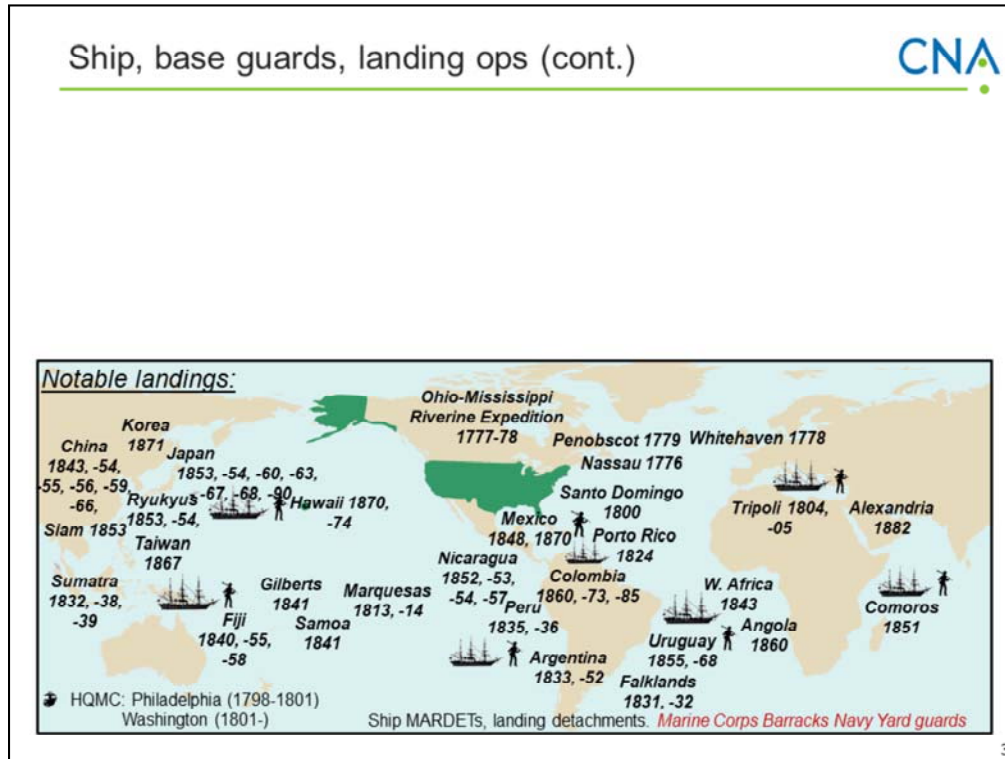
- 1946–50: Shrink, pull back, retrench, experiment
- 1950–53: Expand, deploy, fight in Korea, MAGTF
- 1953–65: Reposition, respond to crises, exercise
- 1965–71: Expand, innovate, fight in Vietnam
- 1971–79: NEOs; refocus on Soviets in Europe
- 1980–89: SWA, maritime strategy, crises responses
- 1990–91: Surge, build up, fight, win vs. Iraq/crises
- 1991–2001: OMFTS and crises responses
- 2001–11: GWOT surges: Afghanistan, Iraq
- 2011–16: Prep for ROMO: amphib, crises, peers, etc.
- 2016: Snapshot of the present
- 2016– : Future vision: ready to surge for ROMO



For the first century or so of its existence, the deployment strategy of the US Marine Corps reflected mostly that of the US Navy. Marines formed integral parts of Navy ships’ companies, and Marine Barracks were a feature of the Navy Department’s Navy Yards. During the American Revolution, Marines deployed on Continental and state navy warships, and on some privateers. Once the US Navy was established, its larger vessels sailed with Marines on board. Marines acted as ships’ guards, providing discipline and ensuring security. They also served as sharpshooters, participated in boarding parties and ship self-defense, and manned some of the ships’ main guns. Usually more expert than sailors ashore, they were typically an important element of ships’ landing parties and were used frequently and globally for this purpose, of which the 1805 landings in Tripoli are the most famous.

As the young Republic found its footing among the world’s nations, Marines often acted as escorts and security forces for American diplomatic and consular representatives sent abroad on US Navy warships. Ashore back in the United States, Marines in Marine Barracks provided security and performed guard duty at US Navy Yards from 1798, occasionally being called out to assist local civil authorities in policing, firefighting, and disaster response.

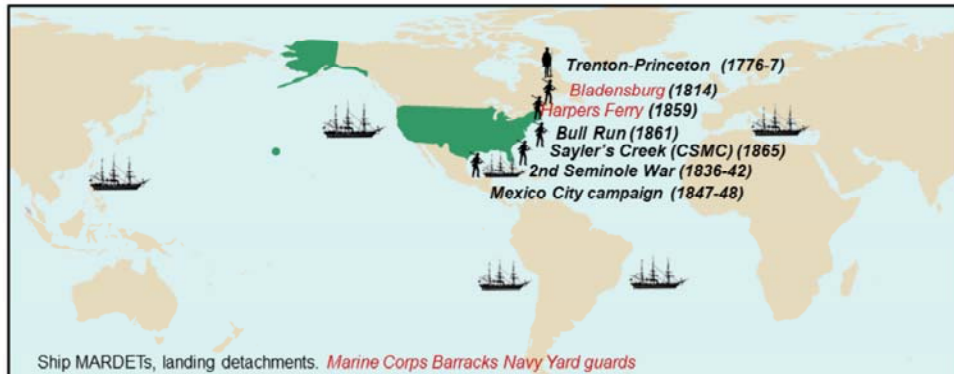
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The Corps during this period was quite small, growing from a force of less than 100 to some 4,000 Marines, then reduced to 2,000 by 1885. The rank of the Commandant increased from Captain in 1775 to Major (1776), Lieutenant Colonel (1800), and Brigadier General (1867), reverting to Colonel in 1876. Marine Corps Headquarters was established in Philadelphia in 1798, moving to Washington in 1801.

Ground ops alongside the Army: 1775–1885

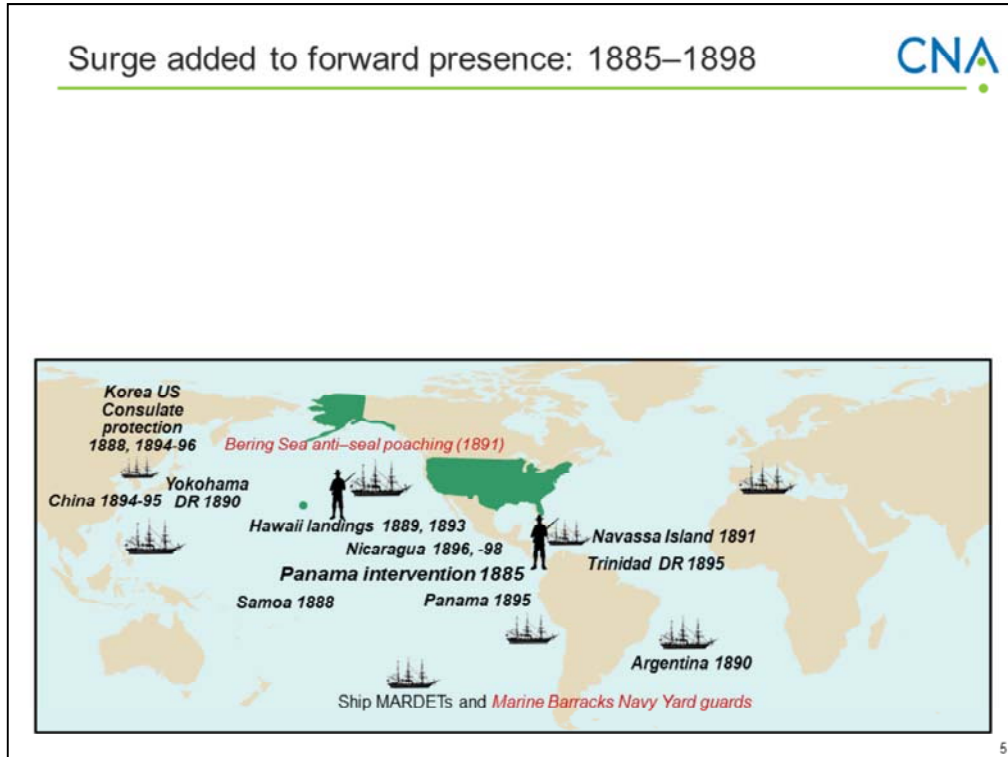


Even in these early days, however, there were times when the ground combat skills of the Marine Corps were enlisted for ad hoc operations with, and sometimes under, US Army command. Besides carrying out their naval duties mentioned earlier, Marines also served with the Continental Army as ground troops in the American Revolution (at Trenton and Princeton) and at Bladensburg in the War of 1812, the Mexico City campaign in the Mexican War, the Second Seminole War, and Bull Run and Sayler's Creek during the Civil War.

Some of their service on the ground during this period was in defense of the American homeland, including defending Philadelphia and Charleston during the Revolution, and Craney Island, Washington and New Orleans in the War of 1812. Marines also conducted internal security functions with the Army at Harpers Ferry in 1859 during the run-up to the Civil War.

During the American Revolution, some Continental Army infantry deployed and fought on Army vessels. During the Civil War, the very small Confederate Marine Corps served in a coastal defense role.

Surge added to forward presence: 1885–1898

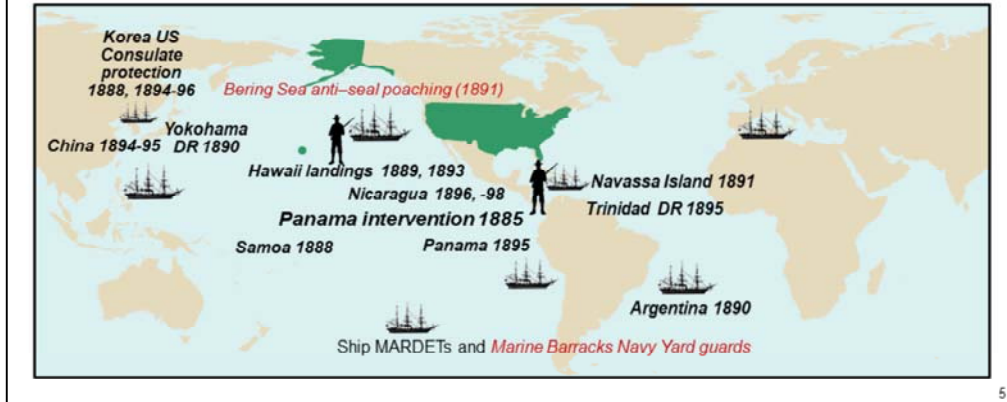


The 1880s brought with them the beginnings of change in America's place in the world, as well as in the way it deployed its Marines. Marines still deployed on forward US Navy warships and guarded Navy Yards at home. They still acted as essential members of Navy landing parties, especially in Korea and Hawaii, and including providing disaster response to fires in Yokohama and Trinidad.

In 1885, however, a transformational and precedent-setting change in US Marine Corps deployment occurred: the first Marine expeditionary surge operation from the United States to an overseas location. During an American intervention in Panama in 1885, Marines from Barracks in the US deployed on transports to reinforce Marines and sailors serving on forward-deployed Navy warships off Panama. A Marine Corps colonel commanded the resultant combined Naval Brigade, a regimental-size landing force.

The 1880s also saw the beginnings of the emergence of the United States as a modern world power, especially in the Caribbean, and significant growth and modernization of the Navy. By the end of the decade, some politicians and officers of the new "steam and steel navy" began to question the necessity of many of the traditional shipboard roles of Marines, including the enforcement of security and discipline, as well as the manning of ships' guns. This issue would be the source of great debate and Navy-Marine friction for more than two decades.

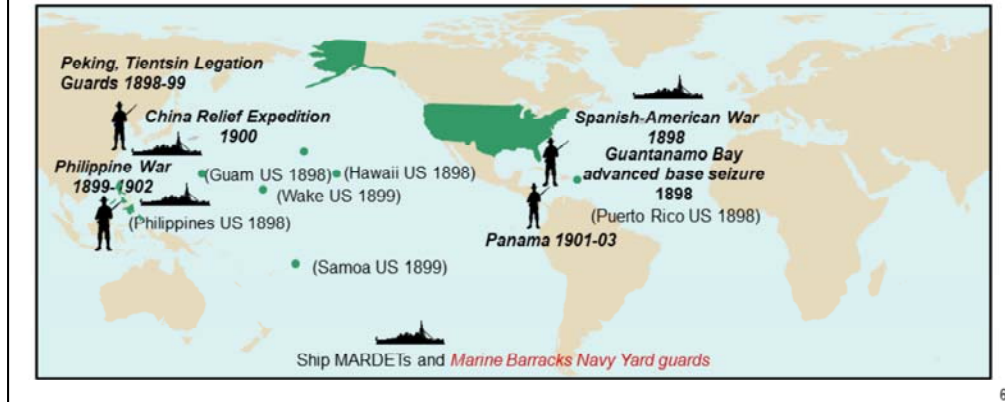
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Marines continued to serve on board warships, however, and provide security for Navy Yards. They even performed some ad hoc domestic security duties, including anti-seal poacher boarding operations in the Bering Sea.

Marine Corps end strength stayed about the same during this period, fluctuating from about 4,000 to 2,000 to 3,500.

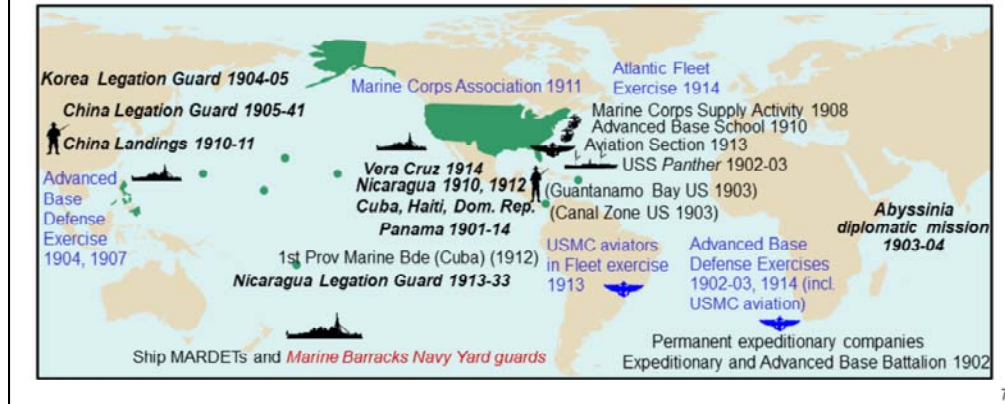


The period of the Spanish-American War and its aftermath saw another seminal, innovative, and precedent-setting event in US Marine Corps deployment history: the first US Marine assault on, seizure of, and preparation to defend a forward advanced base, at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in 1898 (following an expeditionary surge deployment on a transport from the US).

Also, in the short space of just four years, US Marines deployed in four major brigade- and regiment-size combat operations: the Spanish-American War, the Philippine War, the Boxer War, and another major intervention in Panama. Moreover, partly as a result of these operations, especially the war with Spain, the United States took over a large number of distant forward islands and quasi-islands: Hawaii, Guam, Wake, Samoa, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guantanamo Bay, and the Panama Canal Zone. This created a national military requirement for expeditionary colonial infantry, which the Marine Corps strove to meet. Marines provided legation guards and saw combat in China during the Boxer War, and a Navy-Marine team conducted a major counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign in the Philippines from 1899 to 1902.

Meanwhile, the US Navy was undergoing enormous growth and modernization, including the Marine Corps. Marine end strength grew transformationally, from about 3,500 to over 6,000, almost doubling. The rank of the Commandant was raised again to Brigadier General in 1899, and—in an unprecedented move—to Major General in 1902.

Expeditionary ops, advanced base plans: 1902–1914

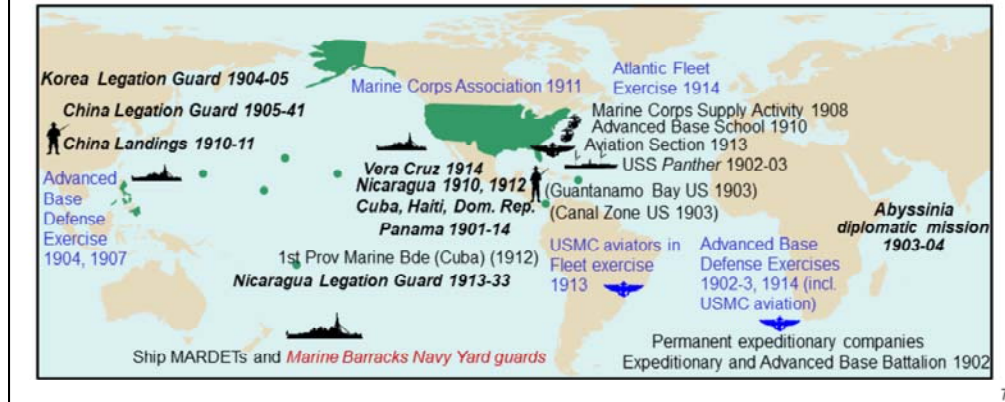


During the early part of the twentieth century, the United States became—and acted like—a great world and naval power, requiring much from the Marine Corps. In another transformational and precedent-setting innovation in its deployment strategy, in 1902–03 the Marine Corps deployed in the Caribbean its first afloat forward contingency force on the transport USS *Panther* for potential intervention in Honduras or elsewhere.

The Marines effected other seminal changes as well during this period: They created an expeditionary and advanced base battalion in 1902 and their first permanent expeditionary companies in 1906 and 1912. They held their first advanced base defense exercises in Puerto Rico and the Philippines in 1902–04. They set up a modern supply activity in Philadelphia in 1908, their first Advanced Base School in 1910, and their first recruit depot at Mare Island in 1911. And the Marines created a new Aviation Section, training, exercising, and deploying the first US Marine Corps naval aviators in 1913. In 1911, a band of innovative officers created the Marine Corps Association to further the interests of the Corps, including through dialogue and innovation.

Marines continued to serve on board US Navy ships (that controversy having been resolved in 1908–09). Thus they were available to land from Navy warships with sailors in major interventions in China, the Caribbean, and Mexico.

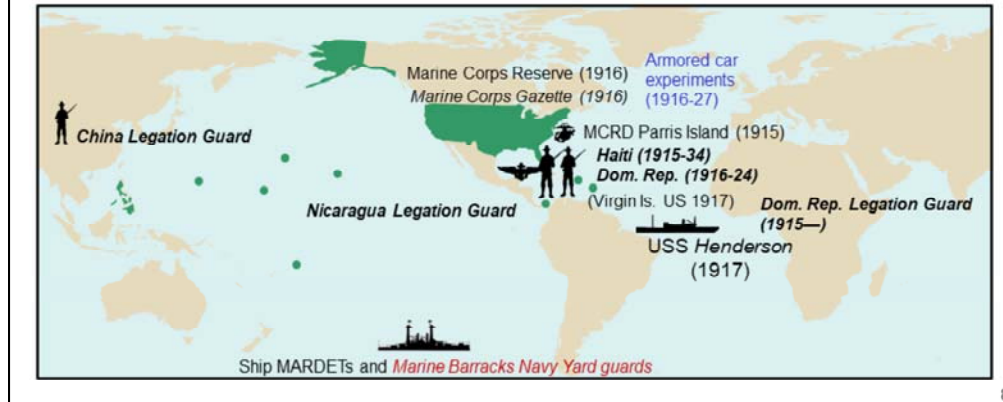
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They also provided US legation guards in Korea, China, and Nicaragua, and diplomatic security in Abyssinia; they also continued to provide security at home for Navy Yards as well as at new naval facilities (with new Marine Barracks) being developed in America's new island possessions. Marine Corps end strength continued to grow—from 6,000 to 10,000—and to be organized in larger units: battalions, regiments, and brigades.

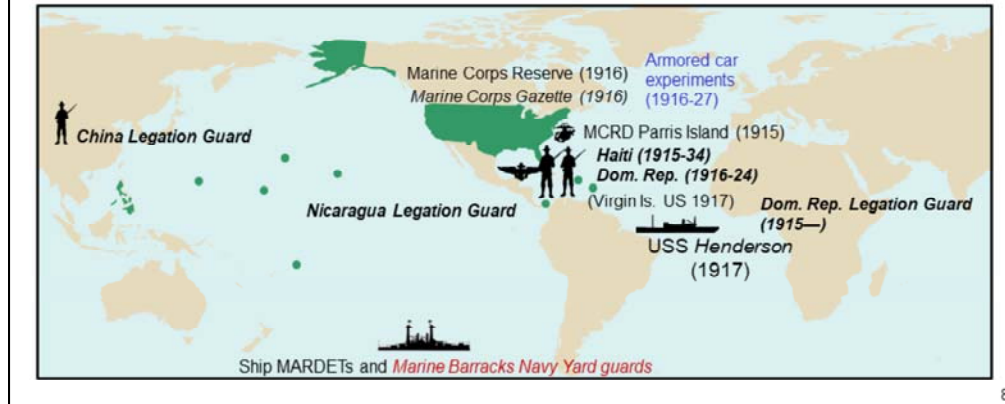
Occupying, training, small war fighting: 1915–1917



Much of Europe went to war in 1914, with campaigns also occurring in the Atlantic, the Pacific, and in Africa. Meanwhile, a neutral United States began to flex its own power even more in the Caribbean, purchasing the Virgin Islands from Denmark and establishing informal protectorates elsewhere. This drove yet another transformation in US Marine Corps deployment strategy: overseas occupation and Foreign Internal Defense (FID) training operations in Haiti (from 1915) and the Dominican Republic (from 1916). Marines now became colonial infantry, advisors, trainers, and reformers on the island of Hispaniola—a task they would later expand and continue. They also guarded legations in China, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic.

In 1916, the Naval Appropriations Act formally created a US Marine Corps Reserve. That same year, the Marine Corps Association began publishing the *Marine Corps Gazette* to debate the future of the corps, including through innovation. That same year and through the 1920s, the Marines began testing the use of armored cars—a not particularly successful innovation at the time. In a more welcome and useful innovation in 1917, the Navy commissioned its very first Marine Corps transport specially designed as such: USS *Henderson* (AP-1), designed to carry lighters to unload artillery over beaches.

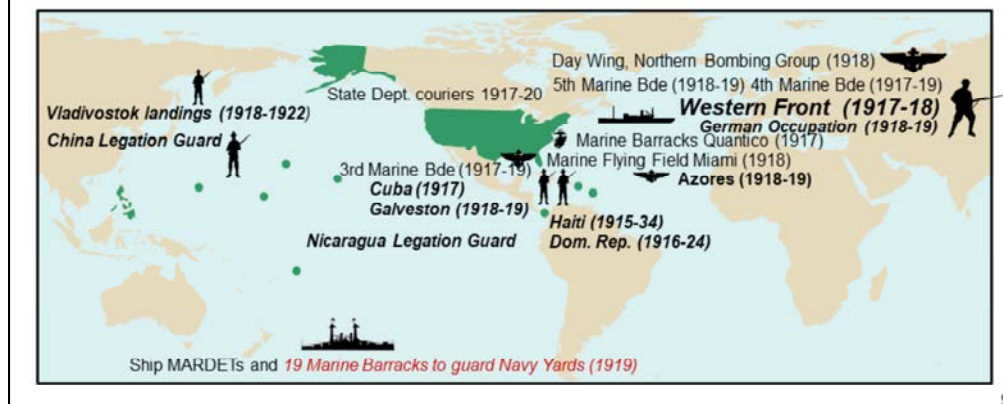
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The Corps also provided an increasing number of Marine detachments to the warships of an ever-growing US Navy fleet. Marine Barracks still provided security for Navy Yards, but also increasingly acted as bases for the surge expeditionary reinforcement of more forward Marine forces, especially in the Caribbean and the Pacific. Growing from 10,000 to 11,000 Marines, the Corps opened another new recruit depot at Parris Island in 1915.

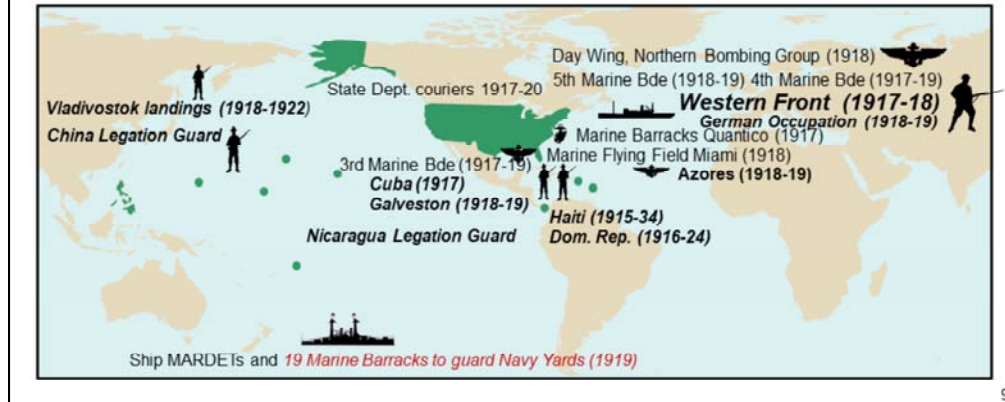
Growth and major ground and air combat: 1917–1919 CNA



The United States entered World War I in April 1917. This event immediately transformed US Marine Corps' deployment strategy yet again. The Marines would still be responsible for occupations, FID, training, advising, and legation guard duties in the Caribbean and China; deploy to Cuba and the Mexican border; and provide 2,000 Marines on 29 US Navy warships and guard greatly expanded US Navy Yard activities. But the Marines' priority would go to engaging the German Army on the Western Front in France in high-intensity forward ground infantry combat under US Army higher command—another transformational change in Marine Corps deployment strategy. The newly commissioned Marine transport USS *Henderson*, designed for colonial and advanced base operations, would be pressed into service immediately as a transatlantic Marine ferry.

The 4th Marine Brigade deployed for France quickly. The 5th followed (but it would not see combat). In time, the 4th's superb commander, Major General John Lejeune, would be given command of the entire US Army 2nd Division (including the 4th). US Marine Corps aviation expanded and deployed forward also, but quite separately, conducting anti-submarine warfare operations for the Navy from the Azores and strike operations with the Royal Air Force.

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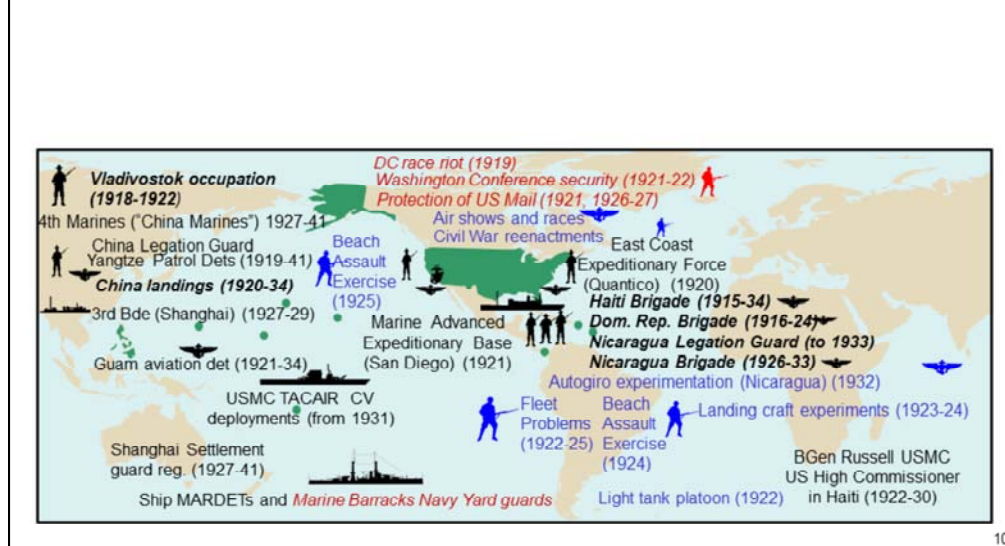


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After the Armistice, many Marines remained forward in Eurasia, in occupation duties in Germany, but also in an intervention force in Vladivostok, Russia.

Marine Corps end strength soared, from 11,000 in 1917 to 75,000 in 1918 (with a third of the Corps in France), dropping to 49,000 in 1919. Meanwhile, Marine aviation, which began the war with eight aircraft, finished it with 10 times that number. A Marine Barracks was created at Quantico in 1917, along with a Marine Flying Field in Miami in 1918.

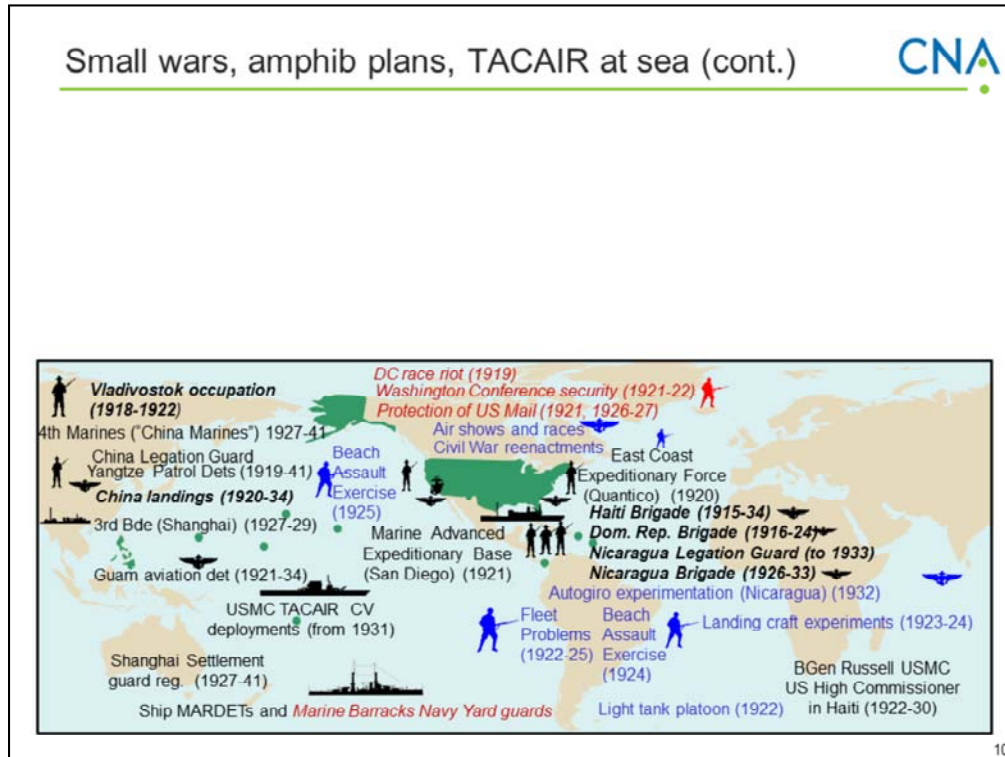
Small wars, amphib plans, TACAIR at sea: 1919–1933 **CNA**



The postwar Marine Corps was cut back to 16,000, still 5,000 more than before the war. (More significantly, it actually increased the number of aircraft with which it had finished the war). The Corps refocused on its continuing—even expanding—colonial infantry duties in China and the Caribbean, and on planning for amphibious operations, building Marine aviation into both roles. The intervention in Vladivostok ended by 1922, but landings in China were frequent, including a 3rd Marine Brigade surge deployment to Shanghai in 1927. The 4th Marines (“China Marines”) would remain in China until 1941. Marine colonial infantry operations, including counterinsurgency and training/advising, continued in Haiti—with a Marine general as High Commissioner—and the Dominican Republic. They increased significantly in Nicaragua, where close air support tactics became well developed. Marine tactical aviation began to deploy at sea on US Navy carriers in 1931, a practice that would generally continue—with significant interruptions—from then on.

Meanwhile, Marines also focused increasingly on the conduct of amphibious assaults on Pacific islands in case of war with Japan, with LtCol Pete Ellis’s study of 1921 as a touchstone. The 1922 Washington Treaty’s prohibition of fortifications on Guam and the Philippines further galvanized the Corps (which worried that the Japanese would violate similar prohibitions regarding their own Pacific islands).

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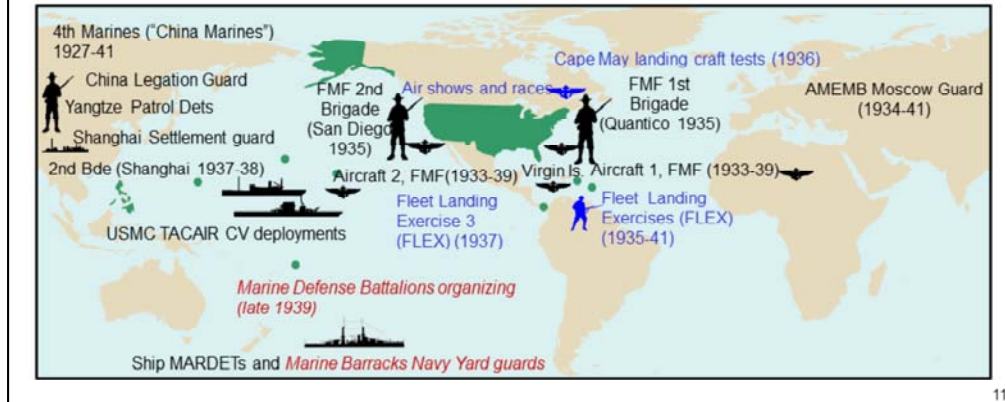


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The Marines held large-scale assault exercises in 1924–25 and participated in Navy Fleet Problems. In 1922, they deployed their first light tank platoon in a Fleet Problem. In 1924, they tested a “Beetle Boat” as a landing craft, then tested A-, B-, and C-boats for the next several years.

Marines continued to serve on US Navy battleships and cruisers and guarding Navy Yards and stations. Marines also were directed to control race riots in the District of Columbia (1919), provide security to the Washington Naval Conference in 1921–22, and protect the US mails. They also re-enacted Civil War battles and participated in air shows and races, staying in the American public eye.

Focus on amphibious assaults: 1933–1939

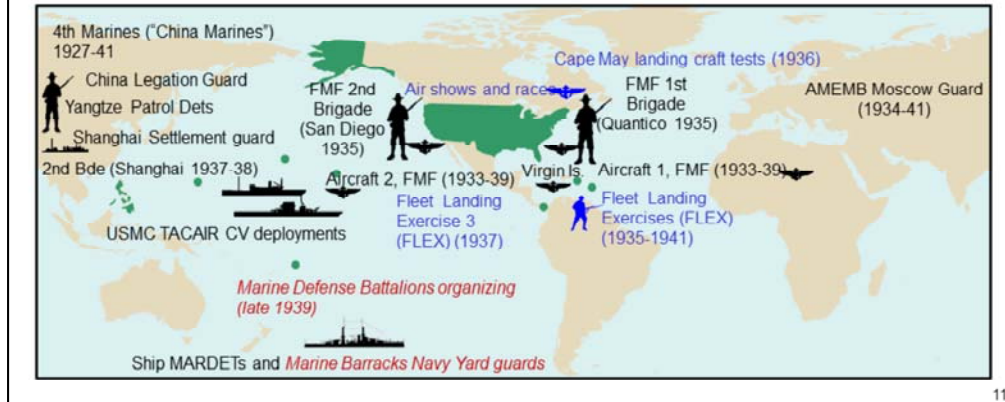


By the early 1930s, the US government had renounced its Caribbean and Central American occupations. Meanwhile, the possibility of war in the Pacific with Japan had increased with Japanese offensives against China. Military and naval planners in Washington were focused on crafting their War Plan Orange against Japan. The Marines readjusted—and redeployed—accordingly. The last Marines stationed abroad were withdrawn from Haiti in 1934, although the Marines still retained guard and patrol duties in China (and the President would assign Marines to the newly opened US embassy in Moscow in 1934). In 1937, Marines reinforced the International Settlement in Shanghai during fighting between the Japanese and Chinese.

In 1933, a new Fleet Marine Force (FMF) was created, with 2,000 personnel assigned, including aircraft squadrons, with responsibilities for advance base defense as well as amphibious assault. FMF brigades were created on each US coast. The term “expeditionary” was banned. Marine Fleet Landing Exercises (FLEXes) and participation in the US Navy’s annual Fleet Problems series greatly increased, as did Marine experimentation with alternative designs for landing craft, lighters, and amphibians.

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Focus on amphibious assaults (cont.)

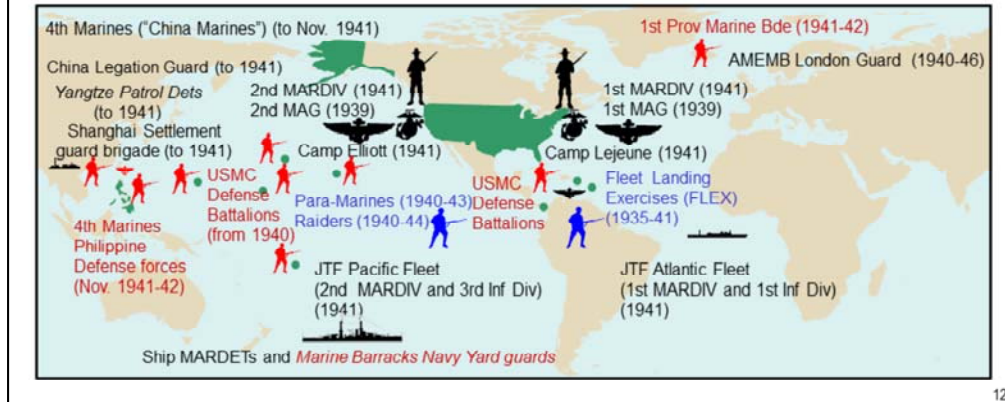


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The Marines also developed and acquired new CTL-3 light tanks. In late 1939, the Marines began to constitute Defense Battalions for forward island defense.

Marine Corps end strength rose from 16,000 to 19,400, while the aircraft inventory also rose, from 107 to 130 active aircraft. The Marines continued sporadically to deploy TACAIR squadrons on carriers as part of Navy air groups.

Expansive growth, deploy to defend bases: 1939–1941 CNA

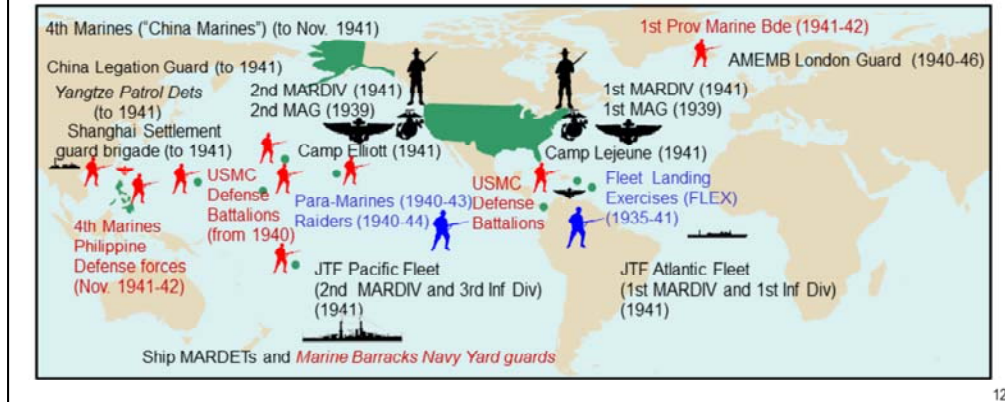


Between 1939 and 1941, the Axis countries overran significant portions of Europe (including France) and China, causing President Roosevelt to put the United States on a war footing and to provide a measure of military and naval assistance to the United Kingdom. US Marine end strength almost tripled (from 19,000 to 55,000) while Marine aircraft numbers increased by more than a third. The two FMF brigades expanded to become divisions (understrength, to be sure) and the Marine aircraft squadrons coalesced into two Marine Air Wings. Marine Defense Battalions were deployed to US Pacific Islands and also to Iceland, while most of the Marines in China were withdrawn. A Marine Guard was deployed to the US Embassy in London.

Two Army–Marine Corps joint forces were created and exercised in 1941—progenitors of subsequent joint task forces. Old Navy destroyers were converted into amphibious transports (APDs). Cargo ships (AKs), transports (APs), and a variety of landing craft began to enter the fleet. During the last Fleet Landing Exercise (FLEX) in 1941, a significant amount of naval gunfire support, air support, and transports were deployed in support of US Marine Corps practice evolutions. Numbers of new M2A4 tanks entered the force.

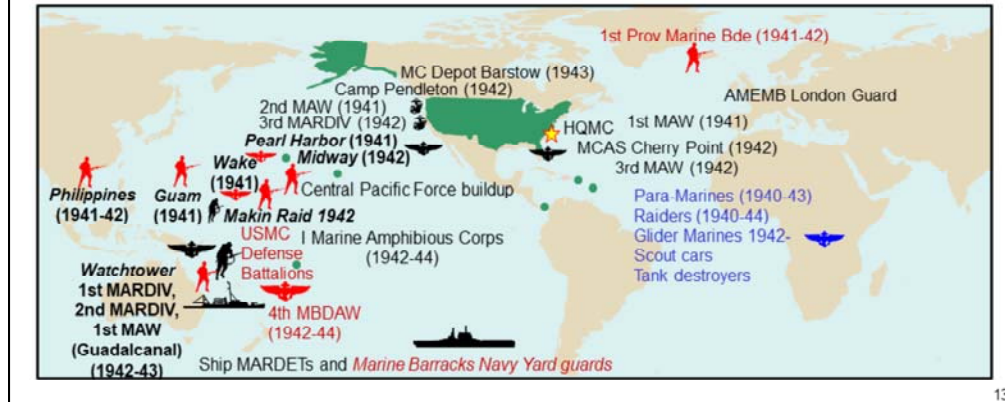
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Expansive growth, deploy to defend bases (cont.)



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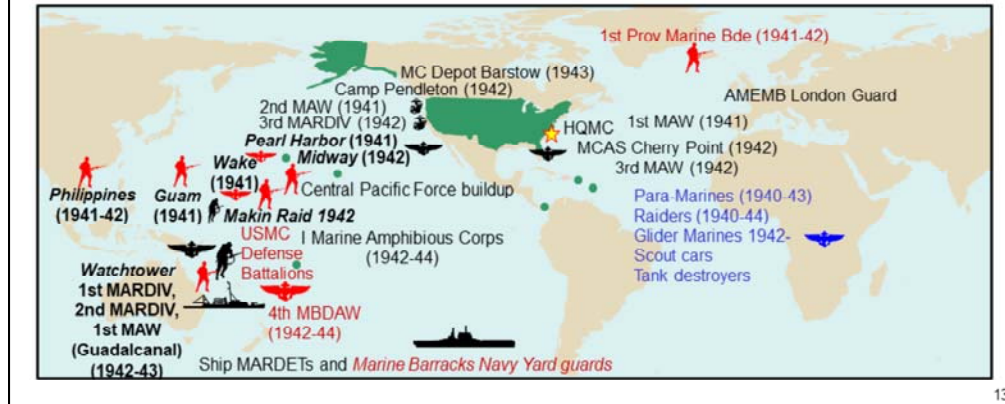
New Marine Corps bases were created in 1941 at New River, NC (Camp Lejeune) and San Diego (Camp Elliott). The Marines also began to experiment with the efficacy of para-Marines, gliders, and Marine “raiders.” As the US Navy fleet expanded, so too did the number of Marines deployed on Navy warships and in Marine Barracks to provide security for naval installations.



With the Japanese attacks on the US Fleet at Pearl Harbor and on other US forces and possessions in the Pacific, the United States formally entered World War II—a war that would see major transformations of US Marine Corps deployment strategy. The first two years of the war would see an almost total Marine Corps refocus on the southwest Pacific, starting with island defense; then the 1942 assault on Guadalcanal; more fighting in the Solomons; and preparations for a Central Pacific drive, starting with the Gilberts. This would be the initial combat test of the Marine Corps’ concepts, doctrine, organization, plans, and equipment developed during the pre-war years. Significant US Army—including Army Air Forces—and Navy forces were also committed to the southwest Pacific, with the Army also heavily committed in North Africa and Europe.

The Marine Corps expanded dramatically, from 55,000 Marines and 180 Marine aircraft in 1941 to 309,000 Marines and more than 1,300 Marine aircraft in 1943. M3 tanks entered the force. The 3rd Marine Division (MARDIV), 3rd Marine Air Wing (MAW), and the I Amphibious Corps were created to help organize the expanded forces. The MARDIVs and MAWs were not linked to each other, however.

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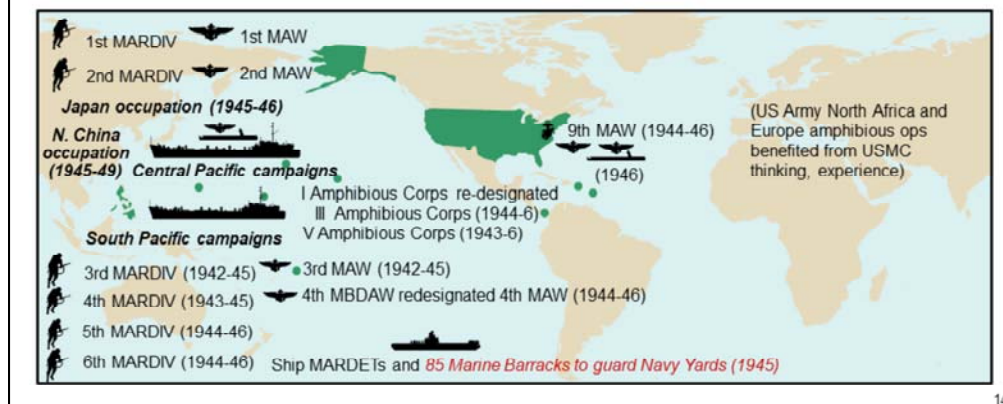


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The Commandant was made a lieutenant general in January 1942, and new Marine Corps bases were opened at Camp Pendleton (1942); Cherry Point, NC (1942); and Barstow, CA (1943). The Marines continued to experiment with special units, even in combat, including para-Marines, gliders, barrage balloons, and “Raiders,” along with scout cars and tank destroyers. None proved viable.

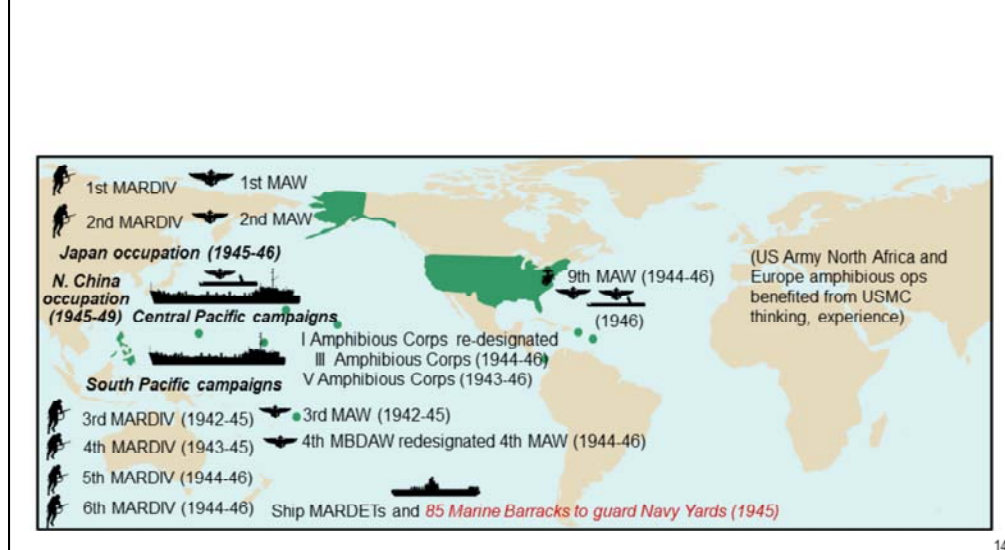
Grow, seize, conquer, and occupy: 1943–1946



The war ended in 1945 with Marine end strength at 486,000 and a Marine aircraft inventory of more than 3,000, almost all deployed in or otherwise focused on the Western Pacific. The Marines had demonstrated their prowess in hard-fought amphibious, ground, and air campaigns there. They had completed the conquest of Iwo Jima and Okinawa (alongside the Army) and were readying for the invasion of Kyushu. Some of their experience had been helpful to the US Army in its operations in Europe. Marines remained deployed primarily in the Western Pacific—as occupiers in Japan and China—through much of 1946, with their numbers dropping precipitously, however, to 156,000 Marines and 785 aircraft.

By the end of the war, the Corps had grown to six Marine Divisions and five Marine Air Wings. Only two of each would remain by the end of 1946. Raiders, para-Marines, gliders, barrage balloons, and defense battalions had all been considered and then discarded from the Marine lineup. A second Marine Amphibious Corps structure had been temporarily created. And the Commandant's rank was elevated to full general in April 1945.

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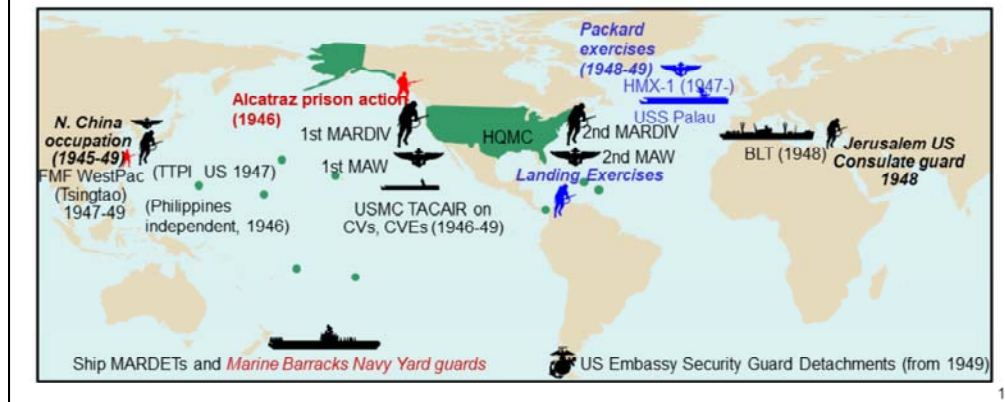
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During the war, new doctrinal arrangements and operational concepts had emerged, especially new Navy-Marine Commander Amphibious Task Force/ Commander Landing Force (CATF/ CLF) command and control relationships. In the last year of the war—but not until then—Marine Air Groups were flying off five US Navy carriers (CVs and CVLs) and four escort carriers (CVEs) against targets ashore.

Other Marine Air Groups had supported US Army ground units from the Solomons to the Philippines. A new fleet of specialized and purpose-built Navy ships had been created for amphibious operations. Marines were fighting with new M4 and M5 tanks. Marines also served aboard a vast armada of large US Navy warships and at Marine Barracks, providing security for the Navy's massive wartime base structure.

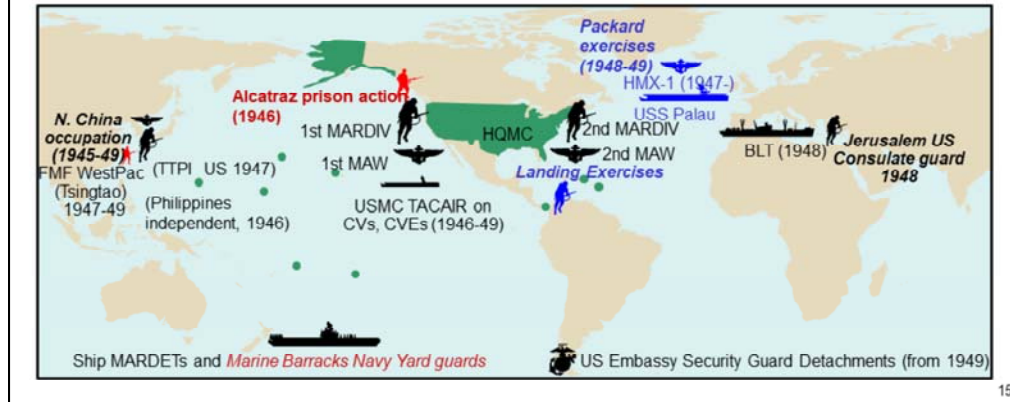
Shrink, pull back, and retrench: 1946–1950



As the world slid into the Cold War and US European and Asian alliances began to be organized, US Marine end strength tumbled from 155,000 in 1946 to 74,000 in 1950, and from 785 aircraft in 1946 to 700 in 1950. Still, this was significantly higher than the 55,000 Marines and 180 Marine aircraft at the start of World War II. Marine Corps end strength in 1950 was only slightly lower than it had been at its old peak in World War I. The Corps continued to comprise only the two MARDIVs and two MAWs that had survived the cuts of 1945–46. The Marines also rebalanced their forces to beef up their presence in the Atlantic, wound down their increasingly untenable presence in China during the civil war there, left Okinawa, and continued to deploy TACAIR squadrons periodically on US Navy escort carriers. Despite their truncated force structure and budgets, Marines continued to exercise their amphibious warfare skills in the Caribbean and elsewhere, picking up where they had left off in 1941.

Yet some important changes were taking place that would prove transformational. Marines began to experiment with amphibious uses of the helicopter, using a US Navy CVE, and with effects of nuclear weapons on amphibious operations. Following their successful employment at a US consulate in Jerusalem, they were also tasked to provide Embassy Security Guard Detachments at US State Department embassies and consulates around the world. Most important, the Navy's newly constituted Sixth Task Fleet in the Mediterranean included two amphibious ships carrying a Marine Battalion Landing Team (BLT).

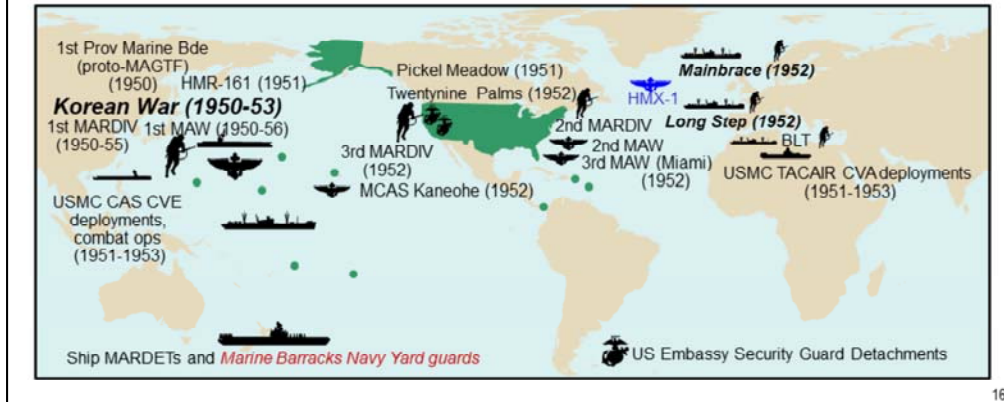
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Thus the Corps deployed—on a permanent, rotational basis—a versatile, combat-ready force forward in the Mediterranean, backed up by a forward carrier force and surge-deployed forces from the United States. Marines were full participants in the Navy’s revolutionary new Cold War deployment strategy—“combat credible forward presence”—from its very inception.

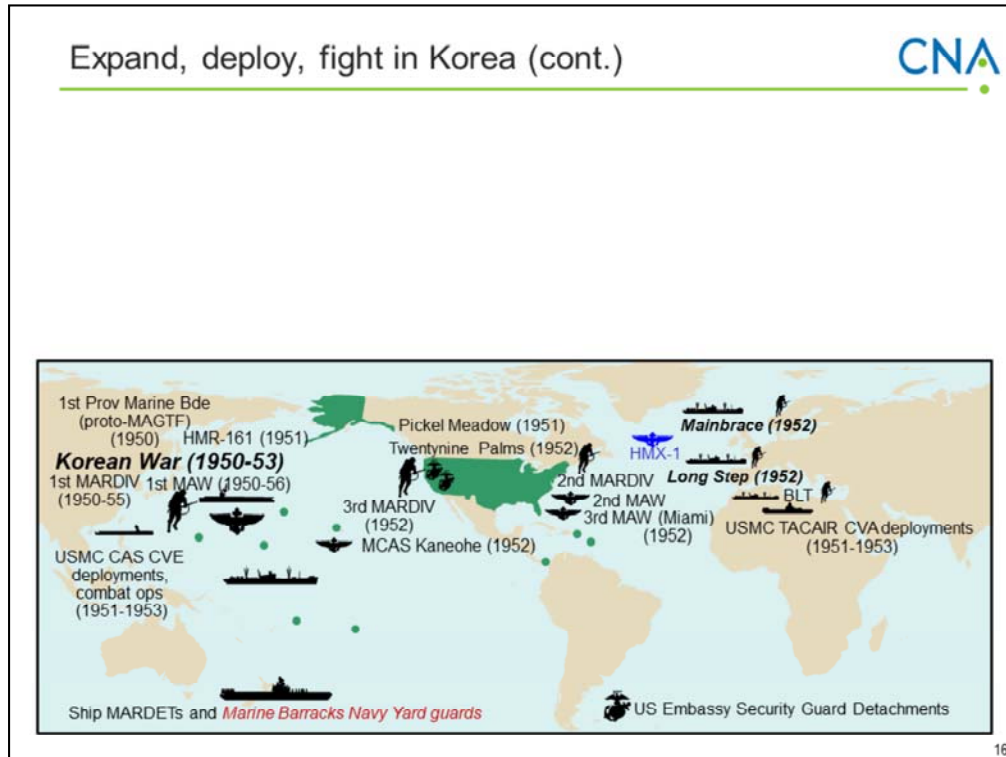
Expand, deploy, fight in Korea: 1950–1953



Communist North Korea's invasion of its southern neighbor in June 1950 drastically and quickly reoriented US Marine deployment strategy yet again. While retaining its commitments in the Atlantic and Mediterranean, the Corps redirected its main focus once more to combat in Northeast Asia. Ready forces in East Asia and the United States immediately deployed to Korea, as did reservists and the ready BLT in the Mediterranean (to be replaced there soon thereafter).

Rapidly deploying and fighting in intense combat in Korea alongside the US Army and supported by the US Navy, Marine Corps readiness and amphibious-ground-air combat prowess ensured the USMC of strong public, congressional, and even administration support. In the first six months of the war, demonstrating both fighting skills and operational maneuver from the sea, the First Marine Division landed under fire at Inchon, withdrew and landed administratively at Wonsan (on the opposite coast), advanced inland, and subsequently withdrew from Hungnam, intact but bloodied by invading Chinese troops. In 1952, Public Law 416 mandated a force structure of three active Marine Divisions and made the Commandant an ad hoc member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for issues of concern to the Corps. Marine end strength swelled from 74,000 to 251,000 Marines, and the number of aircraft more than doubled, from 700 to 1,450—more than the Marines had had in 1943.

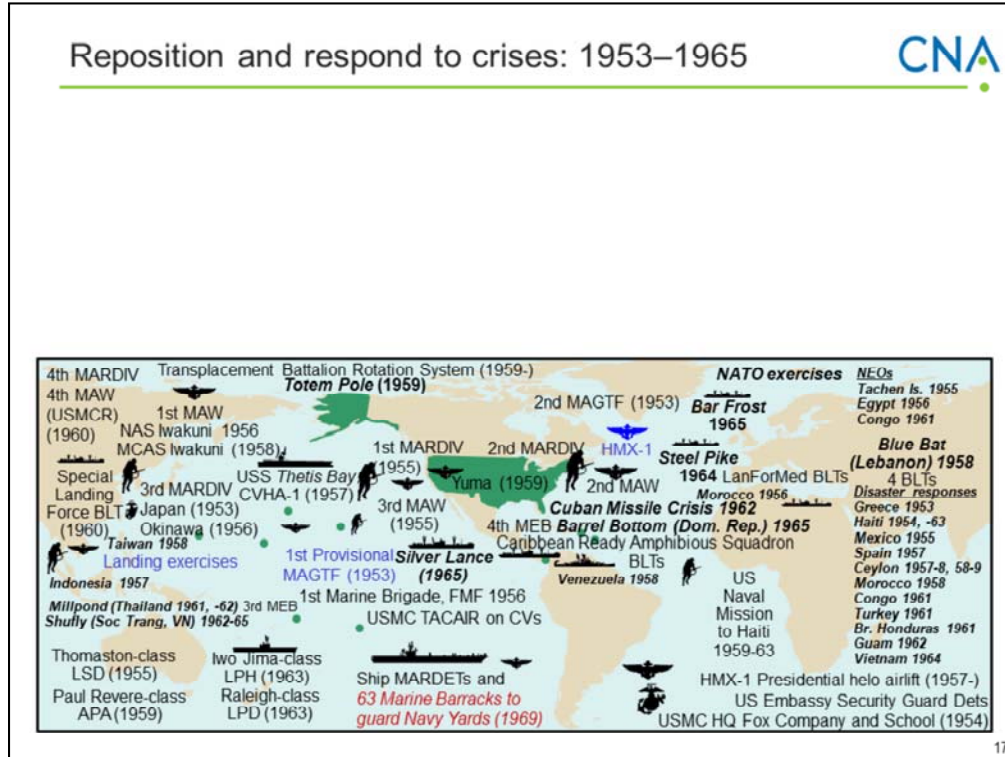
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Marine Corps tactical aviation provided close air support to Marines and others on the ground in Korea, flying off US Navy escort carriers as well as in-theater land bases. The Marines' new helicopters proved vital in combat in Korea, and Marine Corps jet aircraft were deployed for the first time.

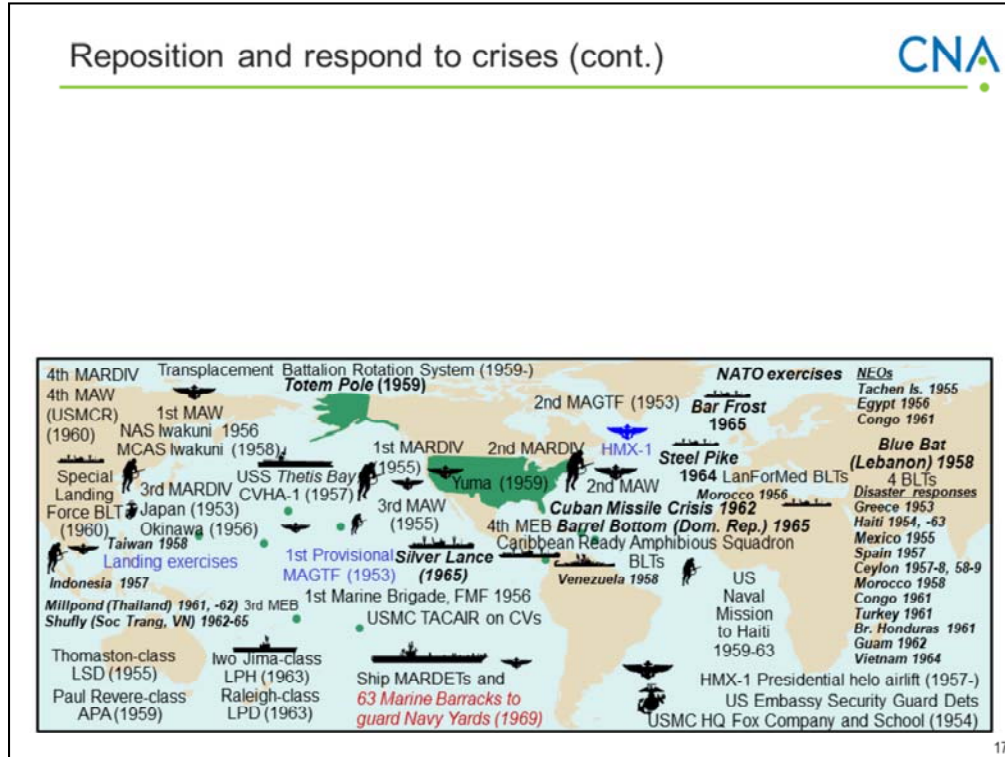
Meanwhile, to bolster deterrence and reassure allies, Marine amphibious forces participated in massive NATO naval exercises off Europe, and Marine Corps tactical aircraft were deployed forward on Sixth Fleet carriers. New Marine bases were opened at Pickel Meadows and Twentynine Palms, CA, and at Albany, GA. Marines also continued to serve on warships, guard naval installations, and protect US embassies and consulates around the world.



The end of fighting in Korea saw a reduction in the Corps, with end strength dropping from 249,000 to 170,000, but ramping back up to 190,000 by 1965—more than double its pre-Korean War strength. The number of Marine aircraft fluctuated but stayed above 1,000. In major adjustments to their deployment strategy, the Marines repositioned the 3rd Marine Division (MARDIV) from Camp Pendleton to Japan in 1953, and then to Okinawa in 1956. The 1st Marine Air Wing (MAW) established itself in Japan. The 1st MARDIV deployed from Korea to Camp Pendleton, and the 3rd MAW moved from Miami to El Toro, CA. Afloat Battalion Landing Teams (BLTs) now deployed forward continuously on US Navy amphibious ships, not only in the Mediterranean but also in the Caribbean and the Western Pacific, where the US Seventh Fleet created a Special Landing Force (SLF) in 1960. US Marine Corps tactical aviation squadrons deployed periodically on US Navy carriers, notably during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.

Marine and Navy development of land- and sea-based helicopter aviation continued, culminating in the introduction into the fleet of USS *Thetis Bay* in 1957 as the first helicopter assault carrier (CVHA-1) and the subsequent commissioning of the first landing platform helicopter (LPH) and landing platform dock (LPD) amphibious assault ships. Afloat Marine contingents began to slowly morph from BLTs to Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs).

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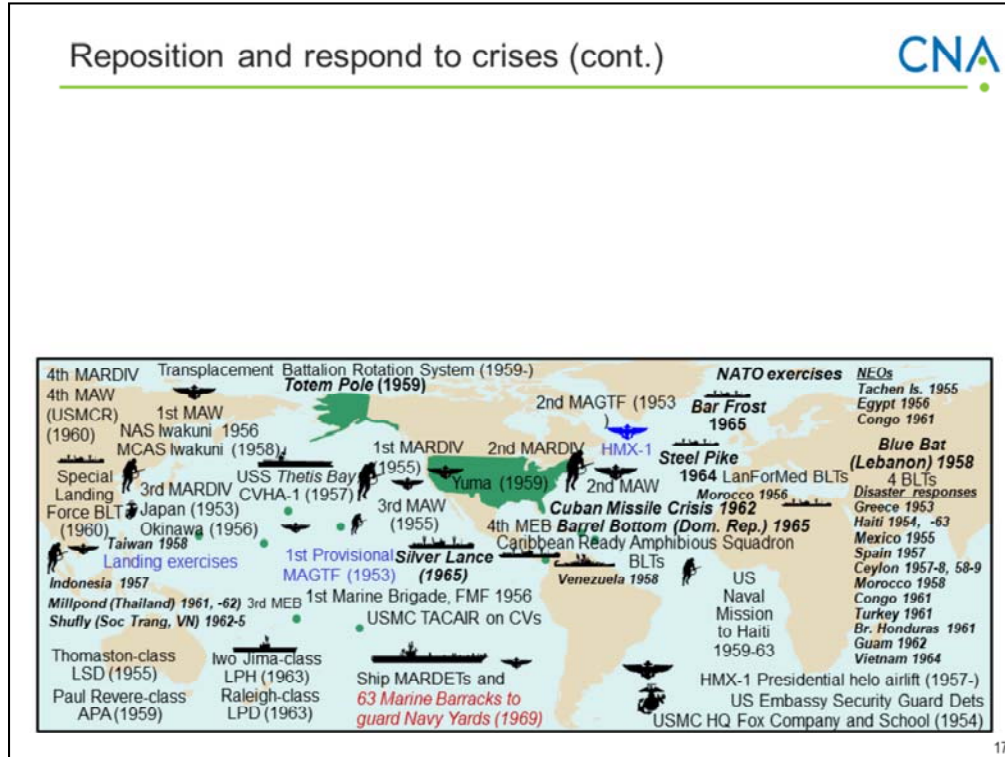
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Also in 1957, the Marines received the mission of US Presidential helicopter support.

Following their vision of an integrated Marine ground and aviation force, the Marines deployed their first MAGTFs in 1953 and promulgated a seminal order on MAGTF doctrine in 1962. Also in 1962, the Marines organized their reserve forces into a 4th MARDIV and a 4th MAW.

The Marines in this period also responded to numerous Cold War and other crises: Marines made major interventions in Lebanon, the Dominican Republic, Thailand (for Laos) and Vietnam’s Mekong Delta. (For Lebanon, the Marines created a 2nd Provisional Marine Force. The 4th MEB was constituted for the Dominican Republic, and the 3rd MEB for Thailand). Marines conducted noncombatant evacuations (NEOs) from the Tachen Islands off China, Egypt, and the Congo, and made afloat shows of force—without landing—off Indonesia and Venezuela. Marines also responded to a dozen natural disasters around the world: in Greece, Haiti, Mexico, Spain, Ceylon, Morocco, the Congo, Turkey, British Honduras, Guam, and Vietnam. A US Naval Mission to Haiti provided Marine advisors to that country’s security force from 1959 to 1963.

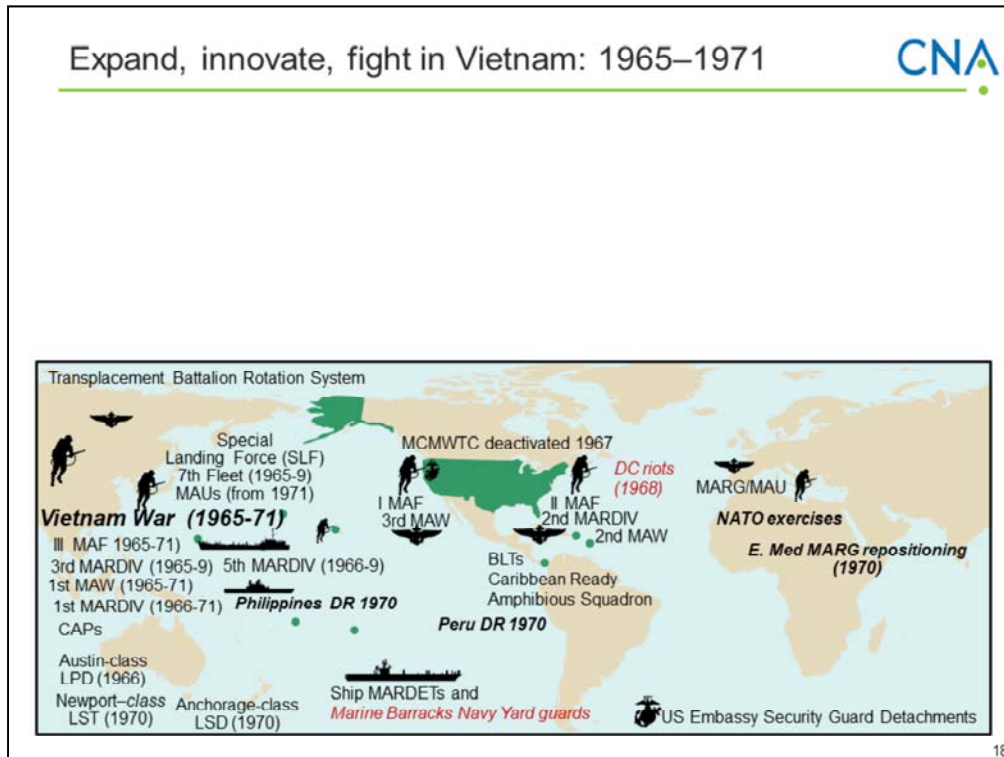
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Marines also participated in numerous US and allied exercises, especially Steel Pike—a massive Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF)–size amphibious assault launched from the East Coast of the United States onto beaches in Spain.

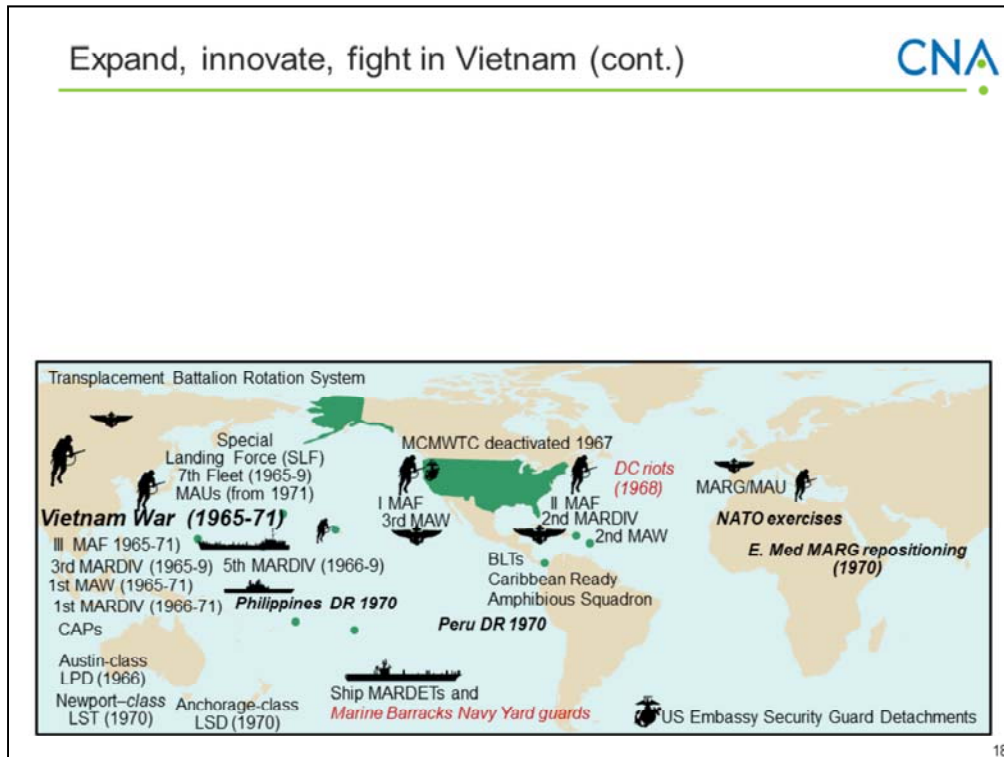
To their long-standing ship and facility guard duties, Marines now added ensuring the security of the Navy’s nuclear weapons. (The Marines also acquired their own nuclear artillery and air-delivered ordinance during this period.) Marines temporarily reinforced US Navy base security in Morocco during French-Moroccan tensions, on Taiwan during the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis, and in the Caribbean during the Cuban Revolution. There were major repositionings of US Marine Corps units in Florida, Guantanamo Bay, and afloat during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.



Ready Marines from III MEF's 9th MEB landed in South Vietnam in March 1965 to protect the airfield at Da Nang. (A month later, US Marine forces worldwide were redesignated as "amphibious" vice "expeditionary.") As direct US intervention in the Vietnam War expanded, headquarters for III MAF and its subordinate, 3rd MARDIV and 1st MAW, shifted from Okinawa and Japan to South Vietnam, and combat in that country quickly became the focus of US Marine Corps global activity. Total Marine end strength swelled from 190,000 in 1965 to 309,000 in 1968 (with more than 85,000 deployed in Vietnam) before falling to 212,000 in 1971, when the bulk of US Marine forces had withdrawn from the war. The Marines continued to field more than 1,000 aircraft during the war. In 1969, the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps was elevated to a four-star general position.

The Marines were concentrated largely in "I Corps," whose tactical zone encompassed the northern five provinces of Vietnam. Assigned operationally to the joint Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), commanded by US Army generals, III MAF Marines expanded their mission set from airfield defense to pacification; civic action; advising South Vietnamese Marines; holding the so-called Demilitarized Zone (DMZ); and seeking out and destroying enemy forces in intense ground combat, including CAS. Two US Army Field Forces conducted operations in the rest of the country.

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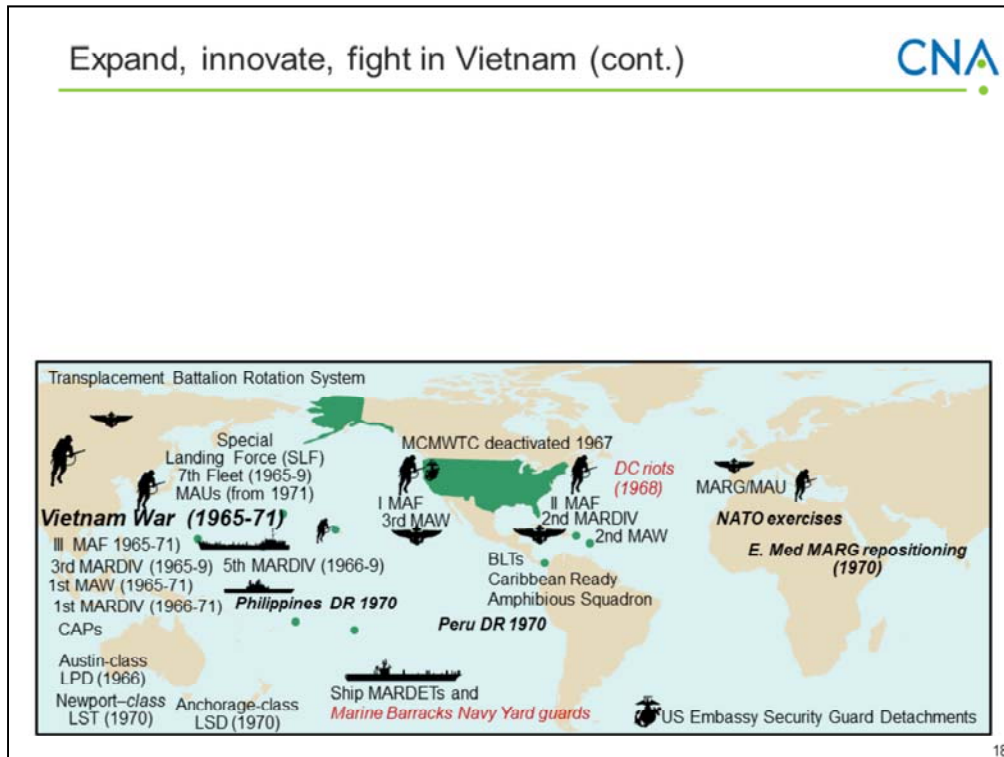


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Meanwhile, elements of the 1st MARDIV moved forward to Okinawa as a contingency force and later to Vietnam as III MAF's second combat division. A new, fourth active-duty MARDIV—the 5th MARDIV—was then constituted in Okinawa and elsewhere in the Pacific for four years as a contingency force, while the US Seventh Fleet conducted amphibious operations where needed along the South Vietnamese littoral, using embarked Special Landing Force (SLF) Marines. III MAF lost control of 1st MAW fixed-wing aviation in 1968 to a US Air Force “single manager” but was usually able to obtain Marine air support for Marines on the ground when needed. To support the ground-based Marine air effort in South Vietnam, no Marine TACAIR squadrons deployed on US Navy carriers from 1966 to 1970.

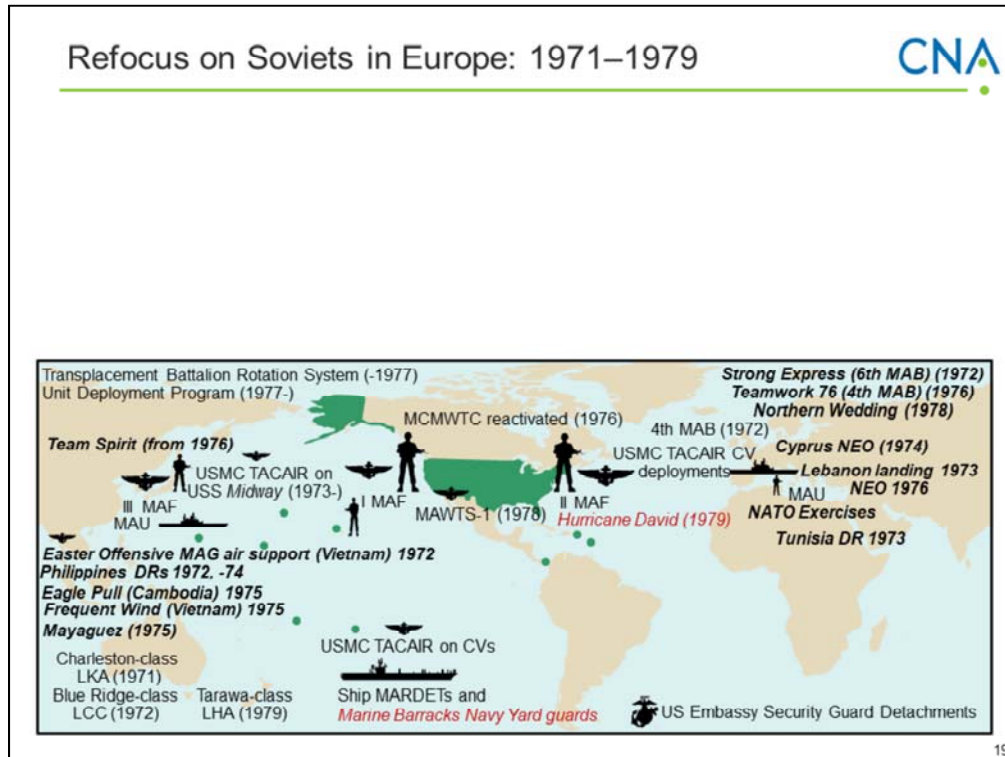
Direct US involvement in the Vietnam War began to wind down in 1969, when the 3rd Marine Division moved back to Okinawa, followed by most of the rest of III MAF the following year. Meanwhile, alongside the demands of the war, the Marines still supplied detachments on major US Navy warships and provided security at Navy shore facilities and US embassies abroad (as well as firefighting and guarding the Capitol in Washington, DC, following the assassination of Rev. Martin Luther King in 1968).

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They also deployed afloat Marine Amphibious Units (MAUs) routinely to Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and the Mediterranean; participated in NATO exercises in European waters; and were designated NATO SACEUR's "strategic reserve" (but disestablished their cold-weather mountain-warfare training center due to their refocus on jungles and other tropical environments). Marines also responded to natural disasters in Peru and the Philippines. The Navy continued to introduce larger, more capable amphibious ships into its fleet, and Marines began flying innovative new land- and sea-based AV-8A Harrier V/STOL close air support aircraft, as well as CH-53 and CH-46 helicopters.

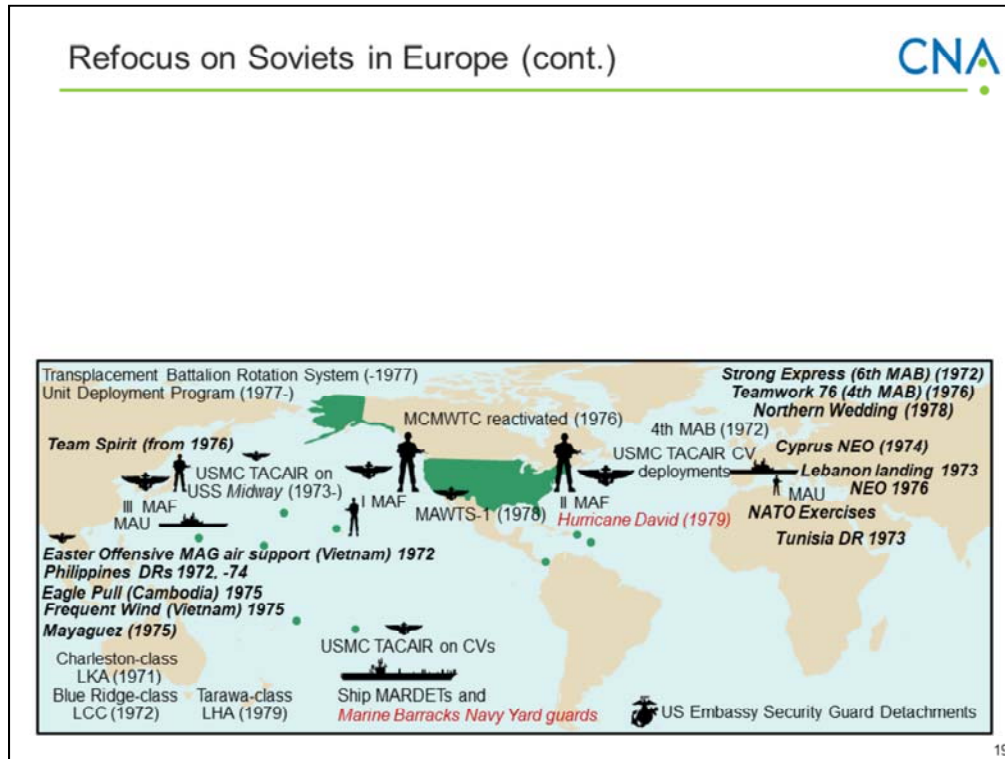


Marine end strength fell after the Vietnam War from 212,000 in 1971 to 185,000—more or less what it had been before the war—but the Corps retained more than 1,000 aircraft. Organizationally, the Corps went back to its legislated structure of three active MARDIVs and MAWs. However, a 1978 law was significant in finally making the Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC) a full member of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff.

As a ready crisis-response force, Marines participated in the emergency operations that ended the Vietnam War, conducted NEOs, and responded to disasters: Marines provided air support to Vietnamese ground forces in 1972 during the “Easter Offensive” and helped evacuate Vietnam and Cambodia and responded to the *Mayaguez* incident; met NEO requirements in Cyprus and Lebanon; and responded to natural disasters in the Philippines and Tunisia.

But the country gave little priority to such noncombat operations following the Vietnam debacle. Meanwhile, the Soviets were building up their armed forces—including those in their Far East and on NATO’s flanks—and especially their Navy, as well as increasingly intervening in crises far from their shores.

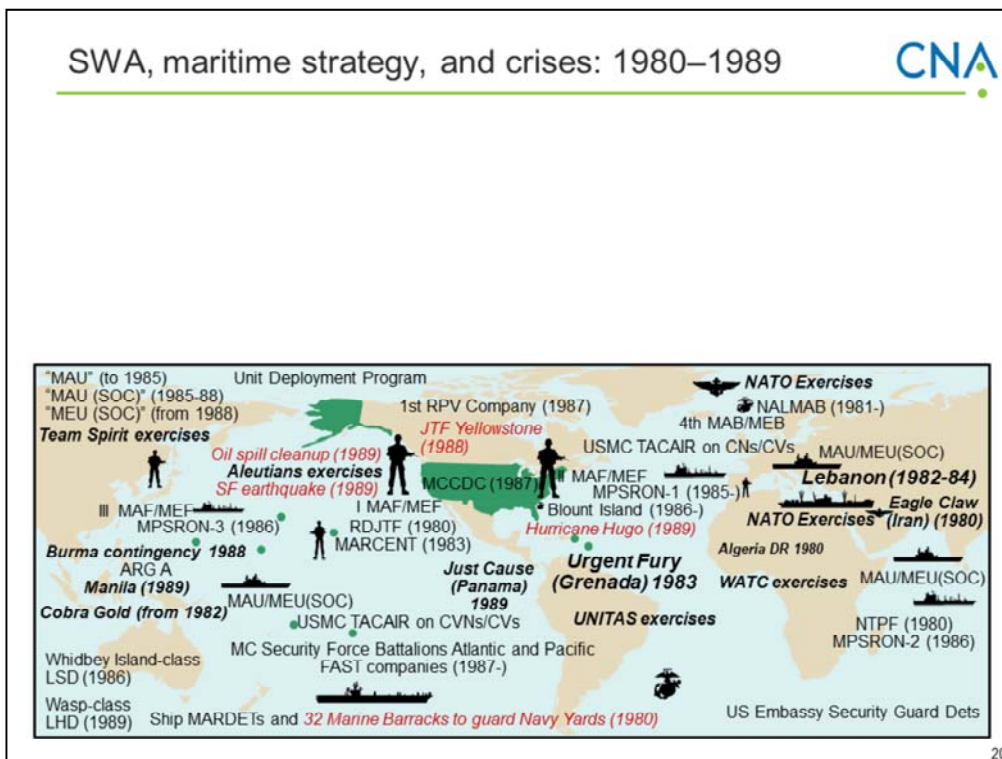
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Accordingly, the US Marine Corps shifted gears again, reinvigorating its participation in NATO’s military planning and exercise programs. MAUs continued to rotate routinely to the Mediterranean, providing permanent forward presence, and Marine TACAIR squadrons and detachments again deployed forward routinely on US Navy carriers to the Mediterranean and Western Pacific—especially on board USS *Midway* (CV 41), the forward-based carrier in Japan since 1973. The 4th MAB was designated as a NATO reinforcement force, most likely to be used in northern Norway, and Marines participated increasingly in cold weather combat exercises there, surge deploying from the US East Coast. The Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center (MCMWTC) was accordingly reopened to train Marines for the rigors of those exercises.

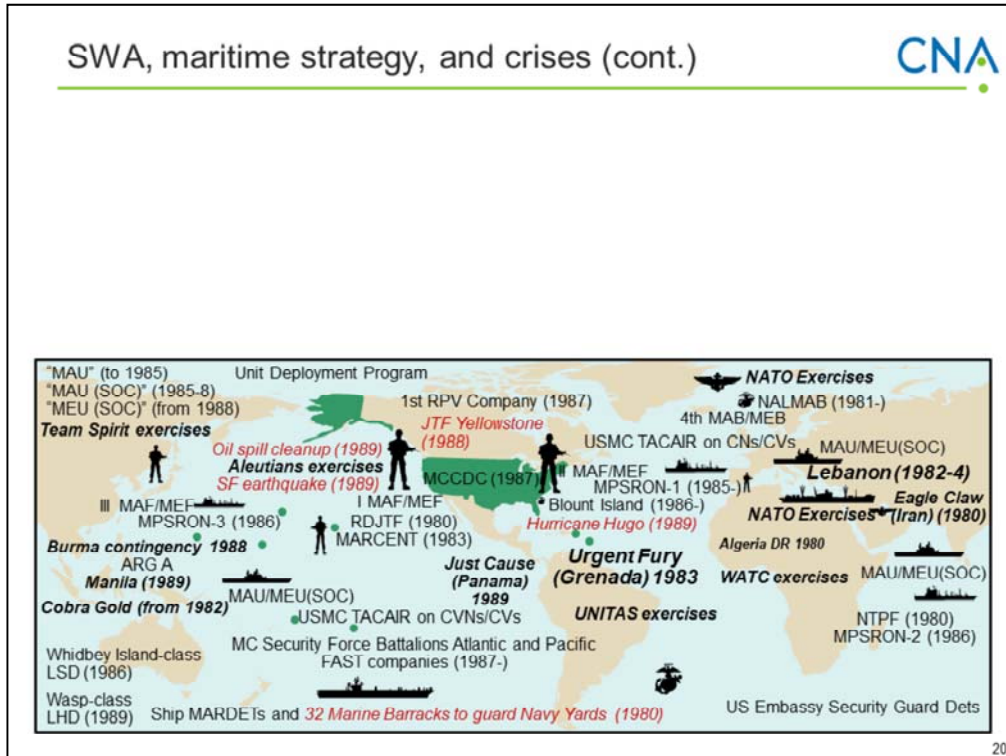
The Marines introduced new LVTP-7s and AH-1T and EA-6B aircraft, and established a Marine Air Warfare Training Center (MAWTC) in 1978. The Navy commissioned still more new amphibious ship classes, especially the transformational Tarawa-class LHD in 1979, but—as part of its post-Vietnam War downsizing—disestablished separate type commanders (TYCOMs) on each US coast for its amphibious forces, folding them administratively into new surface warfare commands in 1975.



During the last decade of the Cold War, the Marines continued their refocus on deterring and fighting a NATO–Warsaw Pact global war, in accordance with the Reagan administration’s aggressive, forward *Maritime Strategy*, but increasingly also focused—presciently—on preparation for Southwest Asia (SWA) contingencies in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Iranian Revolution in 1979, and the failed “Eagle Claw” joint US hostage rescue attempt in 1980. Amphibious Ready Groups/Marine Amphibious Groups (ARGs/MAUs) were periodically deployed now in the Arabian Sea, and a Marine lieutenant general was appointed initial commander of a new US Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF) focused on Southwest Asia, followed later by a Marine general as the second commander-in-chief (CINC) of the successor US Central Command (CENTCOM)—the first Marine joint US combatant commander.

Marines participated in combat interventions in Lebanon, Grenada, and Panama; in numerous exercises and repositionings around the globe (in particular, gaining proficiency in winter warfare in northern Norway and the Aleutians); and in domestic humanitarian operations. New, transformational Navy afloat prepositioning squadrons were deployed forward in the Indian, Atlantic, and Pacific Oceans; these squadrons were loaded with Marine equipment, and a MAB’s worth of gear was also stockpiled forward ashore in Norway.

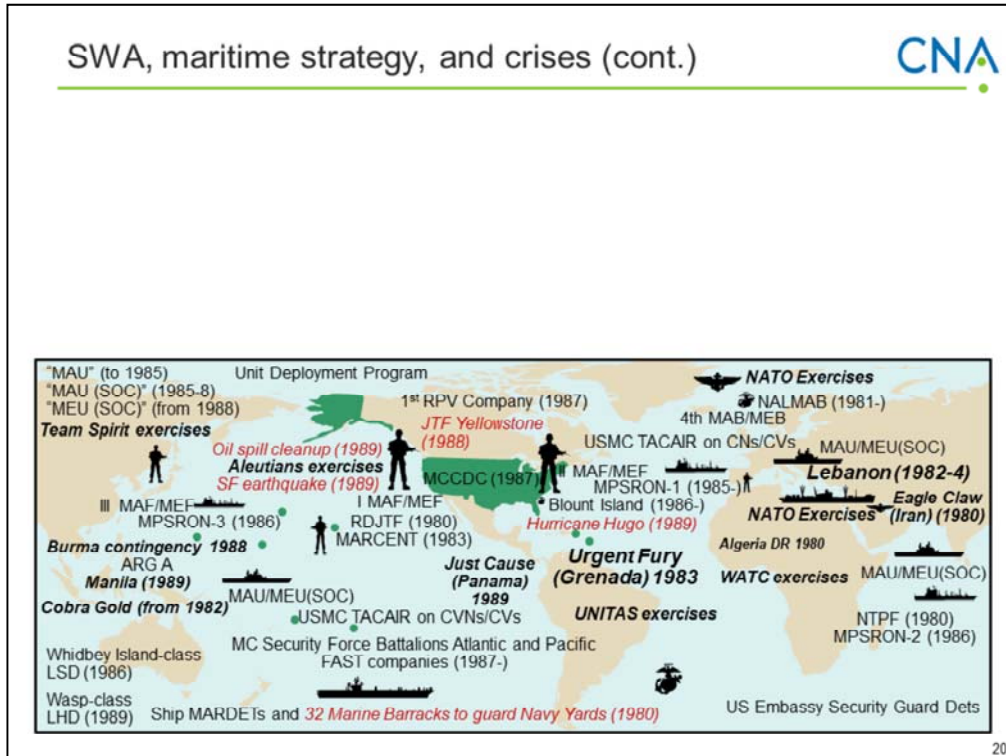
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Marines continued to rotate afloat ready MAUs forward to the Mediterranean and the Western Pacific; periodically deploy TACAIR squadrons forward on US Navy carriers; and serve on US Navy combatants and provide security for Navy bases and US embassies. Specific Marine Amphibious Brigades (MABs) were earmarked to fall in on prepositioned equipment, with the 4th MAB designated operations in northern Norway. Marine end strength rose from 185,000 in 1979 to 200,000 in 1987, and the number of aircraft rose to 1,300. The number (around 60 ships) and tonnage of the US Navy's amphibious fleet increased. Marine aviation received new AV-8B, F/A-18, and CH-53E aircraft, along with new, innovative landing craft air cushion (LCAC) ships and upgraded amphibious vehicles, and remotely piloted (unmanned) aircraft. In 1987, the Marines stood up their first remotely piloted vehicle (RPV) company to operate Israeli-originated Pioneer gunfire spotting drones—what later would be known as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

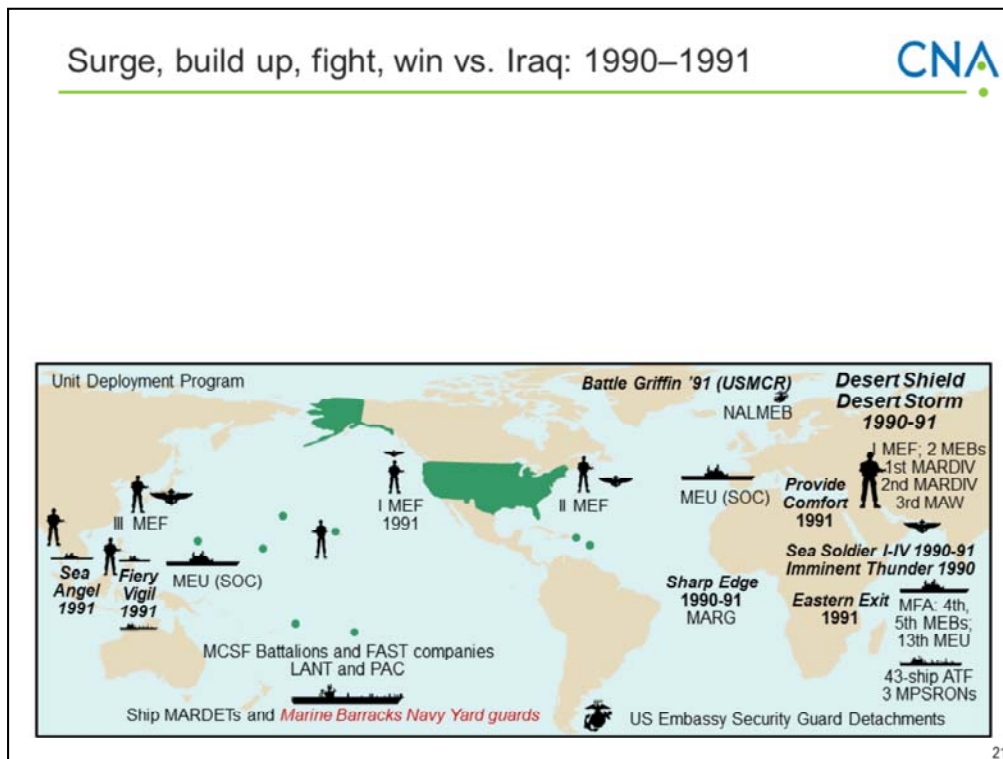
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In that same year, the Marine Corps consolidated its training, education, planning, conceptualization, and doctrinal development activity into one Marine Corps Combat Development Command at Quantico. Starting in 1985, deploying MAUs received special training and the designation “special operations–capable” (SOC). Marines continued to guard Navy nuclear weapons at sea and facilities ashore, as well as embassies overseas, but starting in 1987 Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team (FAST) companies were also set up to provide the Navy with rapid and mobile counterterrorism security augmentation responses (FAST Marines were heavily engaged in Panama in 1989). In 1988, MAGTF terminology changed back from designating units as “amphibious” to “expeditionary”: the MAU(SOC) became the MEU(SOC) and so on.

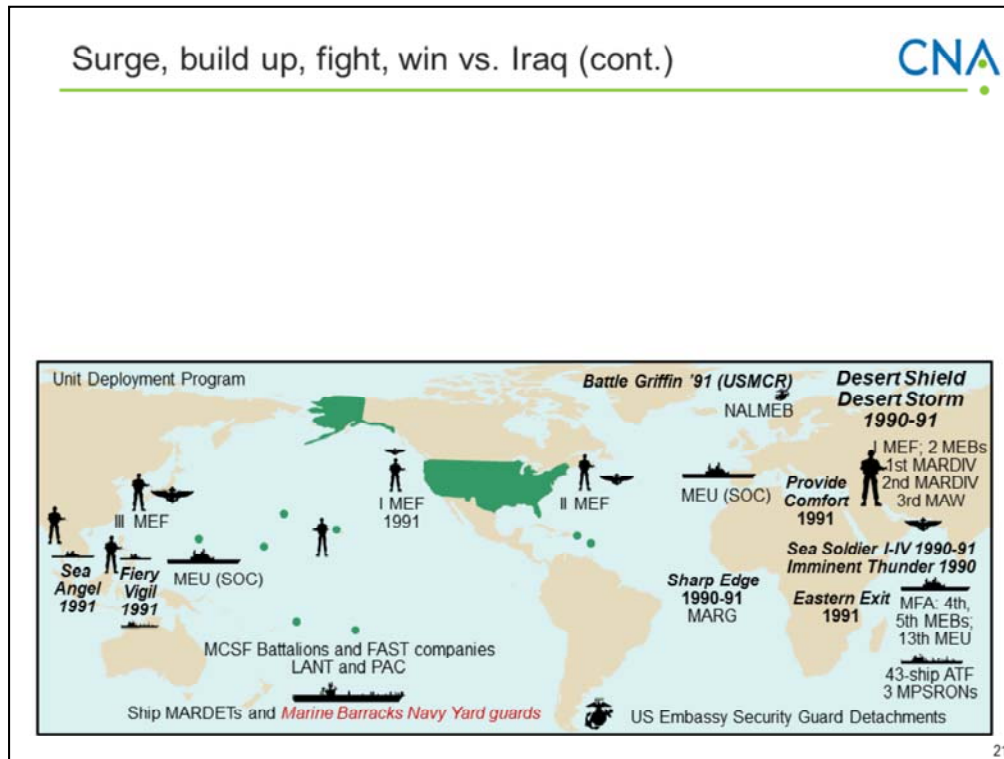
Surge, build up, fight, win vs. Iraq: 1990–1991



By 1990, the demise of the Warsaw Pact was evident—and with it, the waning of Soviet military threats to Europe and the rest of the world. That same year, however, a sometime client state of the Soviet Union, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, seized the neighboring oil-rich emirate of Kuwait and threatened Saudi Arabia. The Marines, while not disengaging from Europe and NATO, had been increasingly focused on Southwest Asia military issues for at least a decade. They were thus well prepared to quickly respond in strength and direction to deploy MAGTFs to Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf by airlift, sealift, prepositioning ships, and on board amphibious shipping, including redirecting forces previously earmarked for European exercises and contingencies.

The Marines established themselves ashore in a MAGTF (two divisions and a MAW under the I MEF commander, as a Marine component commander under USCINCENT). They also deployed two ready MEBs and a MEU(SOC) afloat on an amphibious task force under COMSEVENTHFLT, the Navy component commander. These “Marine Forces Afloat” conducted landing exercises and otherwise drew off and distracted Iraqi forces, while the Marines ashore repelled an Iraqi probe at Khafji, then participated in a rapid air-ground combat campaign north into Kuwait to liberate that country, within range of naval support from US Seventh Fleet ships deployed in the Gulf. Meanwhile, the US Army drove farther west against the bulk of Iraqi heavy armor.

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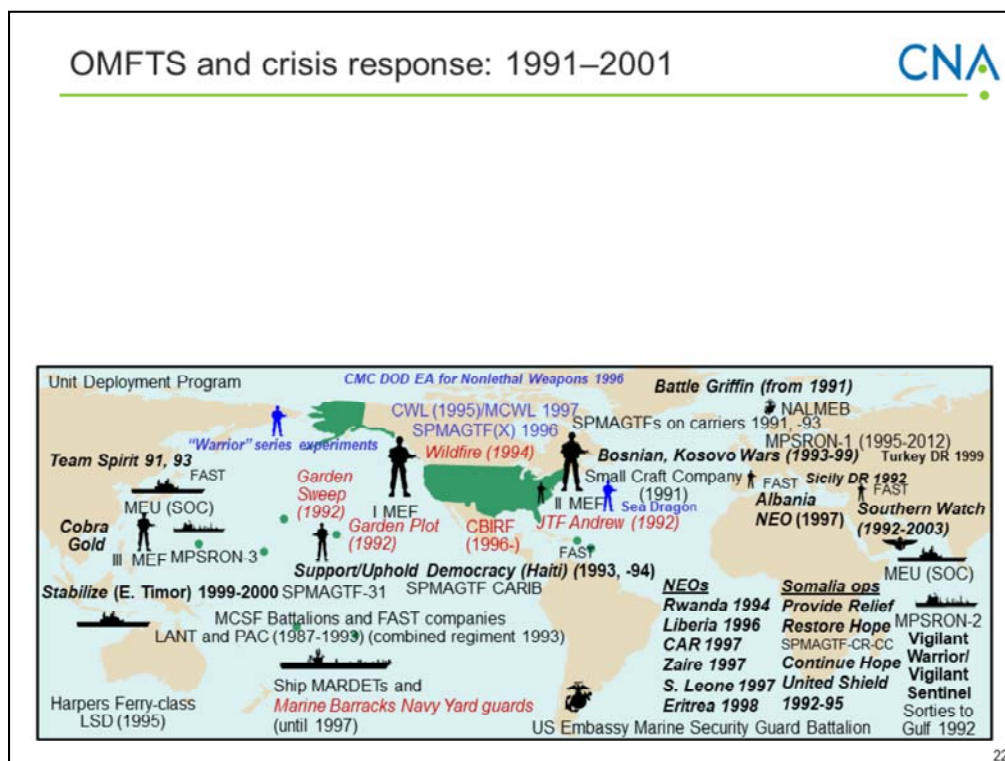
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During the war, Marines successfully operated RQ-2 Pioneer UAVs for naval gunfire spotting, and some Iraqi units attempted to surrender to them.

Meanwhile Marine Reservists took part in a NATO exercise practicing use of the prepositioned stocks stored in Norway, while afloat Marines on amphibious task groups dealt with sometimes violent peacekeeping crises and NEOs in Liberia and Somalia. Marines also conducted extensive humanitarian assistance operations in Bangladesh, the Philippines, and northern Iraq. Given demands on US Marine TACAIR ashore, no squadrons were made available to operate from forward Navy carriers from 1990 through 1992.

Marine end strength declined a bit during this period, from 197,000 in 1988–90 to 195,000 in 1991, while the number of Marine aircraft grew from 1,300 to 1,400.

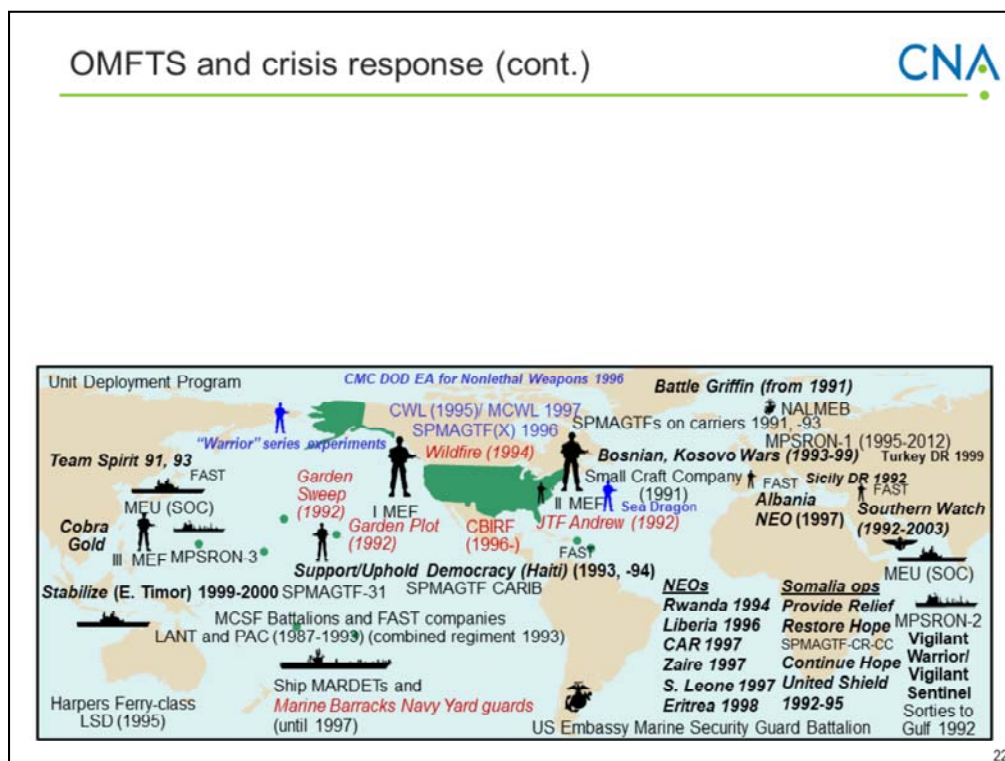
OMFTS and crisis response: 1991–2001



The post–Cold War and post–Desert Storm “peace dividend” period saw active Marine end strength drop from 197,000 to 173,000 in 2001—the lowest level since 1960. The number of aircraft came down only somewhat, however, from 1,400 to 1,300, and Marine F/A-18 tactical strike-fighter aircraft again deployed forward on US Navy carriers—often three or four squadrons a year. Marine TACAIR participated in Operation Southern Watch over Iraq.

Typically, two forward ready MEU(SOCs) were always deployed forward in the Mediterranean, Arabian Sea, or Western Pacific, often participating in forward exercises, diplomatic repositionings, peacekeeping, disaster responses, and NEOs. In 1992–93, a Special Purpose MAGTF–Crisis Response–Central Command (SPMAGTF-CR-CC) assisted in humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping in Operation Restore Hope in Somalia. Marines later participated in positioning and intervention operations in Haiti in 1993 and 1994, the latter through constituting and deploying Special Purpose MAGTF Caribbean. Also, Special Purpose MAGTF-31 was formed for offshore support roles in Operation Stabilize, a 1999–2000 multinational peacekeeping effort in East Timor.

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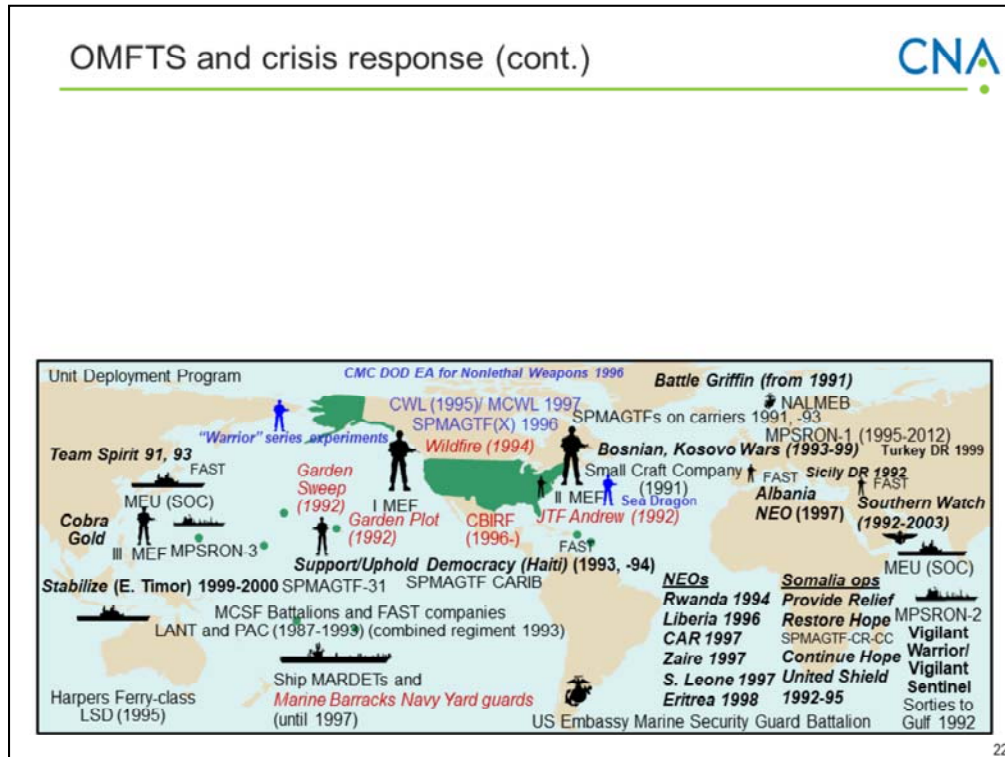


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Ever seeking to anticipate future trends in threats and warfighting, the Marines polished a new doctrine for “operational maneuver from the sea” (OMFTS)—in the making since the 1970s—seeking to conduct amphibious operations more rapidly and farther from the shore, taking advantage of recent and anticipated equipment like the LCAC, the V-22 Osprey, new Navy dock landing ships (LSDs) capable of handling them, and a new generation of UAVs.

They also created a new Small Craft Company (SCC) optimized for riverine warfare and a new Chem-Bio Incident Response Force (CBIRF), but disestablished standing MEB staffs that they had created during the previous decade. Under an imaginative US Sixth Fleet commander, the Marines experimented with deploying Special Purpose MAGTFs on board Navy carriers. At home, they conducted domestic riot control and humanitarian assistance. This period also saw the Marines retire the last of their air-delivered nuclear ordnance, standing down their four-decade-long nuclear weapons capability.

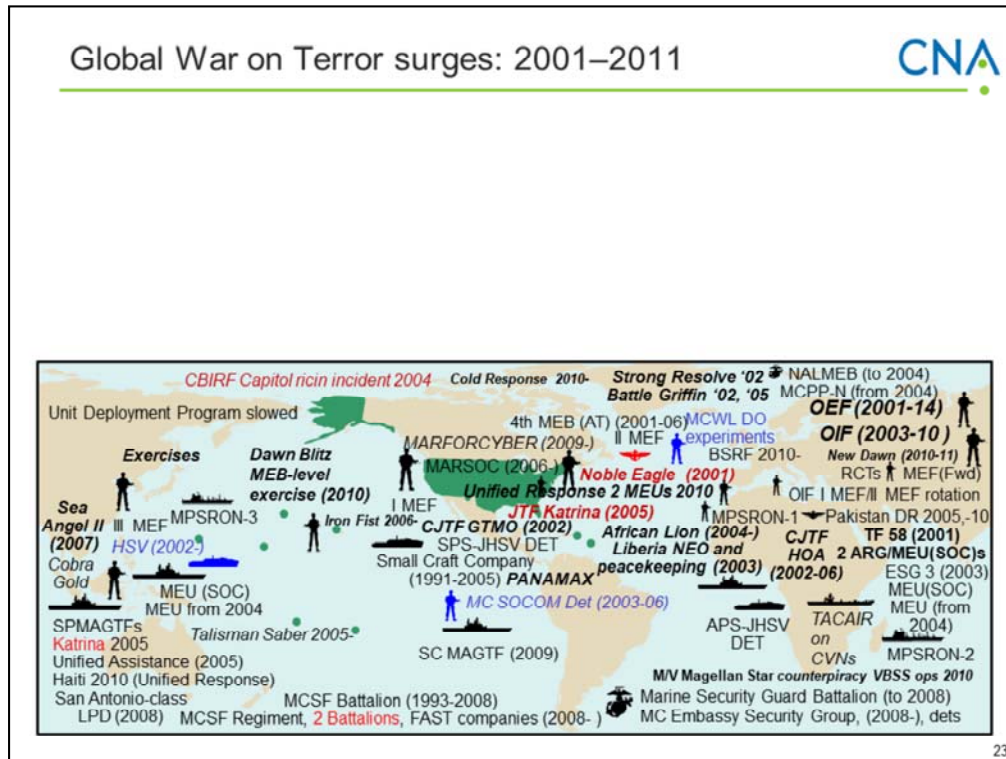
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Under Commandant General Charles Krulak, warfighting experimentation blossomed, with the stand-up of a new Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory (MCWL) and Special Purpose MAGTF (Experimental)—SPMAGTF(X)—and a campaign of experimentation called Sea Dragon, including experiments with chemical and biological incident response, nonlethal weapons, and the “Warrior” series of experiments: Hunter Warrior, Urban Warrior, and Capable Warrior. In 1996, the Commandant of the Marine Corps was designated the executive agent for the entire US Department of Defense for development of nonlethal weapons.

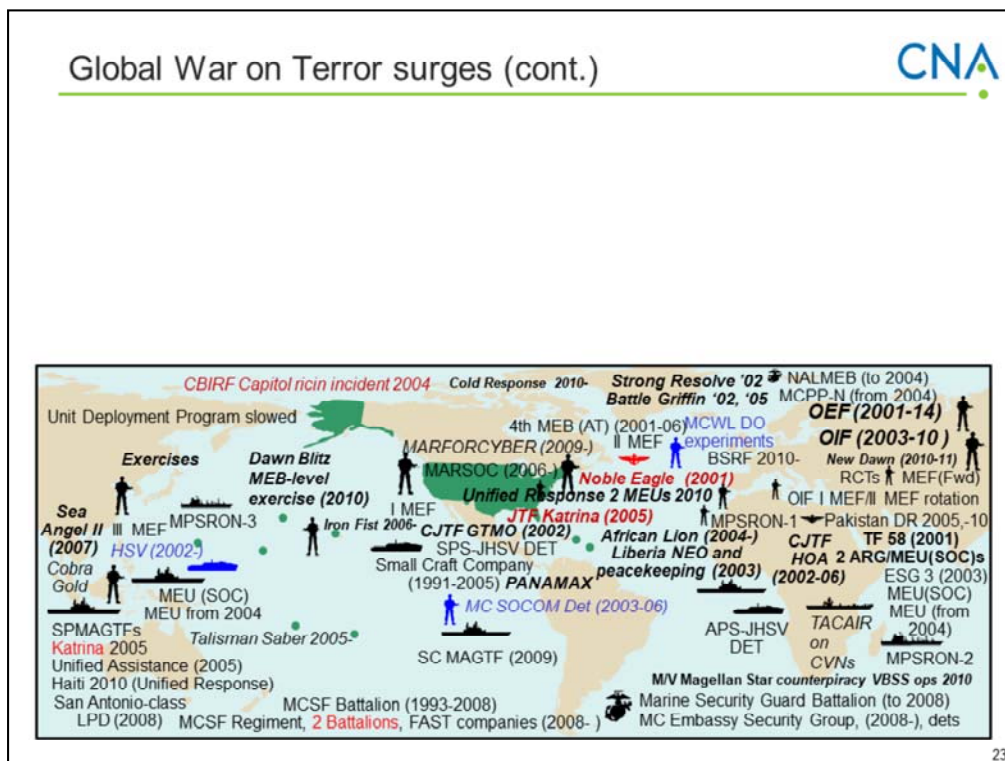
Following the precedent set during Operation Desert Shield, the Marines established their own service component commanders and staffs to report to each joint combatant commander. Another major change was the withdrawal of Marine guards from US Navy warships and naval bases. Henceforth, routine security would be provided by the Navy itself, while the Marines stood ready to reinforce particular situations through their—now increased—FAST companies. Marines would continue to provide internal US embassy security, however.



The Al-Qaeda attack on America on September 11, 2001 ushered in a new era in US Marine Corps deployment strategy. The new strategy focused on the Global War on Terror (GWOT) and especially on counterinsurgency (COIN) and other combat and advisory operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, alongside Army, Special Operations Forces (SOF), and coalition ground and air forces. Marine active end strength ramped up to a peak of 202,000 in 2009—the highest level ever achieved besides World War II and the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Marine aircraft numbers fell somewhat, however, from 1,300 at the start of the decade to 1,200 at the end.

Two MEUs deployed into Afghanistan in November 2001 (a Marine general commanding a Navy-Marine Naval Expeditionary Task Force (NETF)) and Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG), followed by others. TF 58 15th MEU Marines conducted a sea-based air assault operation 400 miles from their ships in the Arabian Sea to Southern Afghanistan. In 2003, I MEF deployed into combat in Iraq alongside US Army troops, to be relieved by II MEF (beginning a series of such rotations). Heavy Marine combat operations continued in both countries. Marines largely withdrew from Iraq in 2003, but built up again the following year conducting COIN, advisory, and occupation operations, especially in its western portion.

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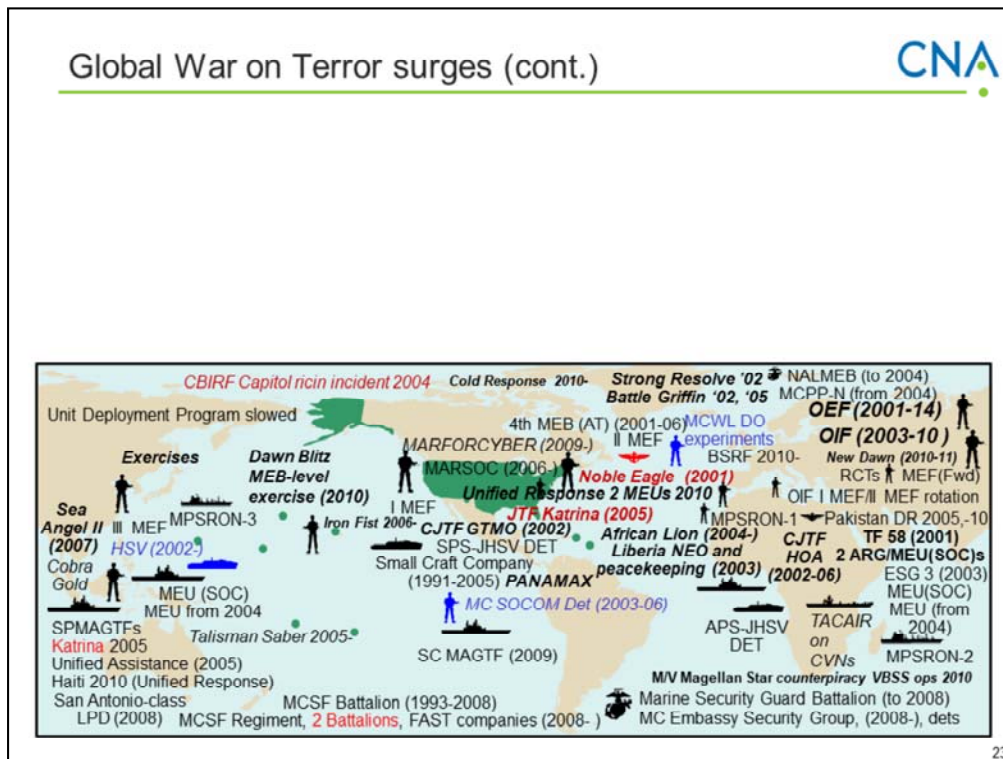
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Marines were part of a successful troop surge to Iraq in 2007 (reaching a peak of 50,000 Marines in-country), finally withdrawing most Marines from that country in 2010. They likewise participated in an Afghanistan troop surge in 2009-11 (with a peak of 42,500 Marines in country in 2011), organized as a Special Purpose MAGTF, then a MEB (Forward) and then a MEF (Forward) (rotating between I MEF (Forward) and II MEF (Forward)).

The Marines withdrew all combat forces from Afghanistan by 2014. Some ready MEUs had been flown to Southwest Asia, while others disembarked there from their ARGs and went directly into ground and air combat, as amphibious roles necessarily took secondary priority for the Corps. Navy ARGs were often disaggregated or split during their deployments and/or operated with foreign or no ground and air forces on board.

Marines were also engaged in a wide range of activities and places during this decade: setting up joint task forces in Djibouti and Guantanamo Bay; conducting NEOs from Liberia, Lebanon, and Israel; responding to humanitarian assistance/disaster response (HA/DR) operations in Haiti, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines, and at home following Hurricane Katrina; and countering pirates in the Indian Ocean.

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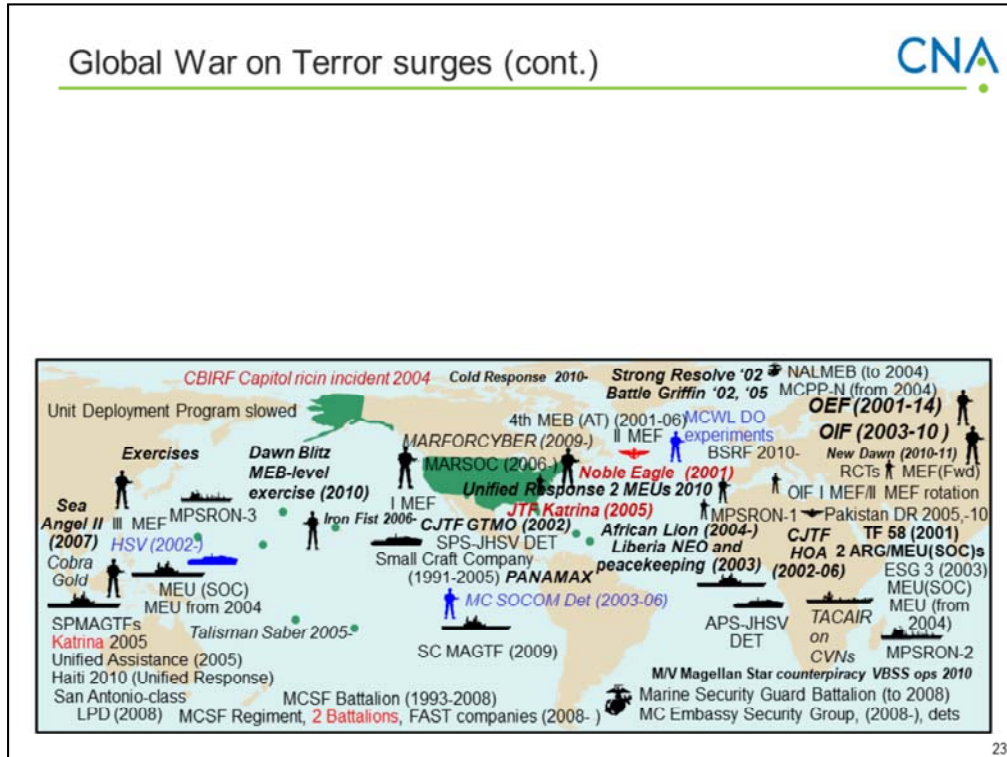
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The Marines also established new elements during this decade such as the Marine Forces Cyber Command (MARFORCYBER), Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC), and a Black Sea Rotational Force (BSRF); and exercising in Norway and elsewhere.

On the other hand, an antiterrorism MEB was designated and then stood down, and the Small Craft Company was disestablished. Marine F/A-18 strike fighter squadrons continued to deploy forward on USN aircraft carriers (in accordance with a formal MOU and MOA signed with the Navy in 2002), often flying from carriers participating in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. Marine TACAIR also patrolled American skies as part of Operation Noble Eagle.

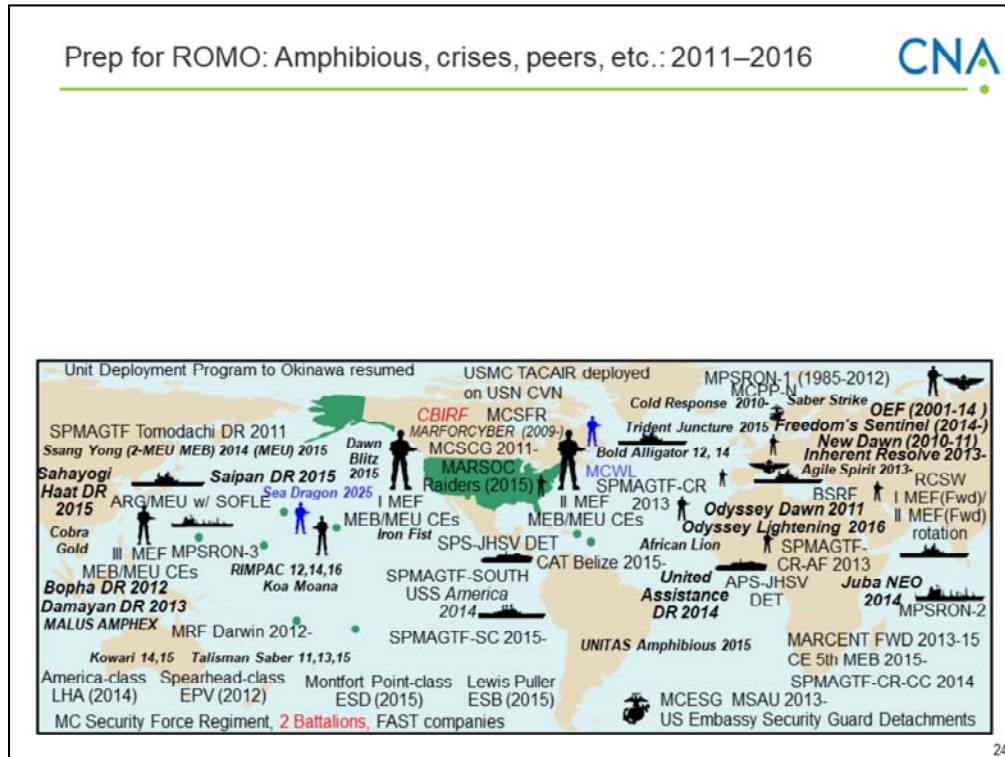
In more firsts for the Corps (and capping its status as a co-equal among the US military services), two Marine generals served as Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the decade, and one rose even higher to serve as Chairman. Marines from III MEF began to successfully deploy on a “Westpac Express” High Speed Vessel (HSV) for troop transport in the Western Pacific, and the Marines introduced the long-awaited V-22 tiltrotor aircraft, along with UH-1Y helicopters and KC-130J land-based tanker aircraft.

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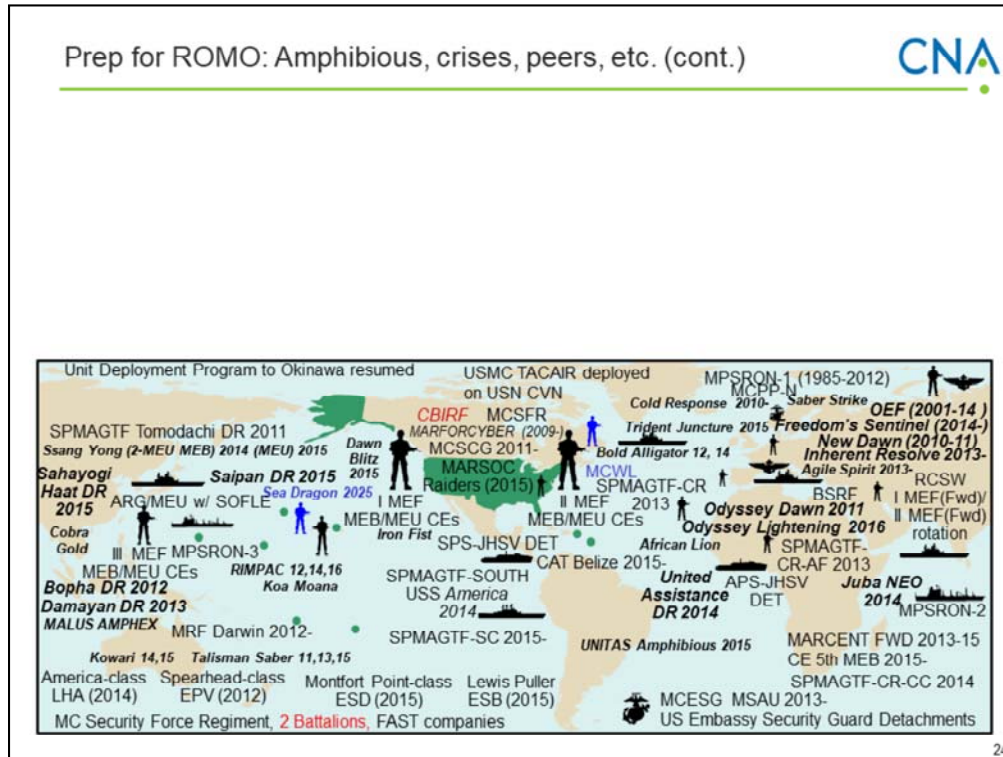
New UAVs were introduced to support each MAGTF level. The Navy launched a new class of LPDs, capable of handling new Marine systems and equipment. MCWL continued to function, supporting ongoing combat operations (e.g., creating the Matilda Village training site), as well as conducting experiments in distributed operations.



The phased withdrawal of most Marines and other combat forces from the COIN wars in Iraq and Afghanistan necessarily refocused the Marine Corps' deployment strategy. Most salient initially was a determined policy to improve Marine maritime capabilities, including skills in amphibious warfare. To that end, the Marines collaborated with the Navy in a series of amphibious exercises, especially the Bold Alligator and Dawn Blitz series. Marines also ramped up their combined amphibious and ground exercise and training programs with partner Marine Corps and armies, especially in the Western Pacific and Georgia. A major new initiative was launched to rotate US Marines to (and from) Darwin in Australia, Hawaii, and Guam—in part to enable reduction of the Marine presence on Okinawa. In 2016, the Marines announced a new program of warfighting experimentation: Sea Dragon 2025—reminiscent of the Sea Dragon experimentation efforts of the 1990s.

At the same time, the Marines adjusted their organizational concepts for rapid crisis response by creating, developing, and deploying the capabilities of a small number of Special Purpose MAGTFs, earmarked for crises in specific regions, acknowledging that limitations on the size of the Navy's amphibious force would necessitate Marines with crisis response capabilities being stationed forward or surge deploying to forward areas without the benefit of a sea base.

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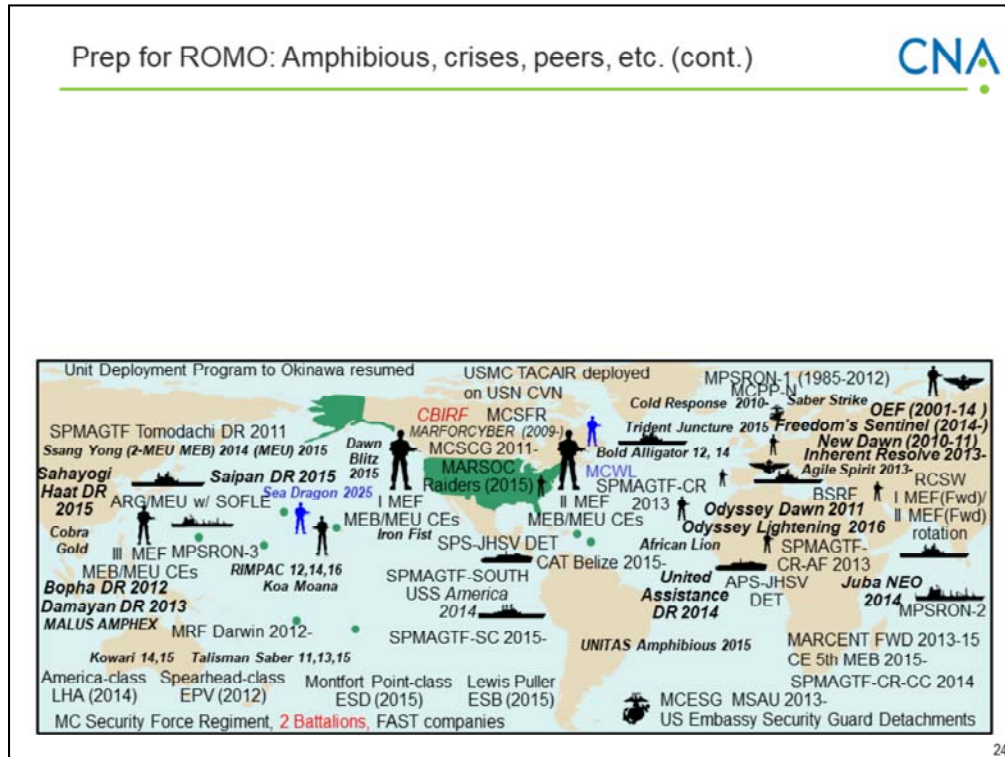
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SPMAGTF–Crisis Response–Africa was stood up in 2013 at Moron AFB, Spain, with detachments in Sicily and Romania. SPMAGTF–Crisis Response–Central Command was stood up in 2014 in the Gulf region, and SPMAGTF–Southern Command was stood up in 2015. A small number of Marines continued to serve as advisors in Afghanistan, and another small contingent returned to Iraq in 2015 in a similar capacity.

Marines responded to demand signals from forward joint combatant commanders to split and disaggregate ARGs and MEUs in their areas of responsibility, and planned training and deployment reconfigurations to make that practice more operationally effective. ARG/MEU deployments lengthened, with usually two or three deployed forward at any one time, and small new Special Operations Forces Liaison Elements (SOFLEs) were taken onboard each deployed ARG/MEU starting in 2015 to facilitate interaction with forward US SOF elements in theater, including MARSOC. (MARSOC subordinate operational elements were renamed “Marine Raiders” in 2015.) Deployable MEB command elements were reconstituted as well, designated along with their parent MEFs for specific regions.

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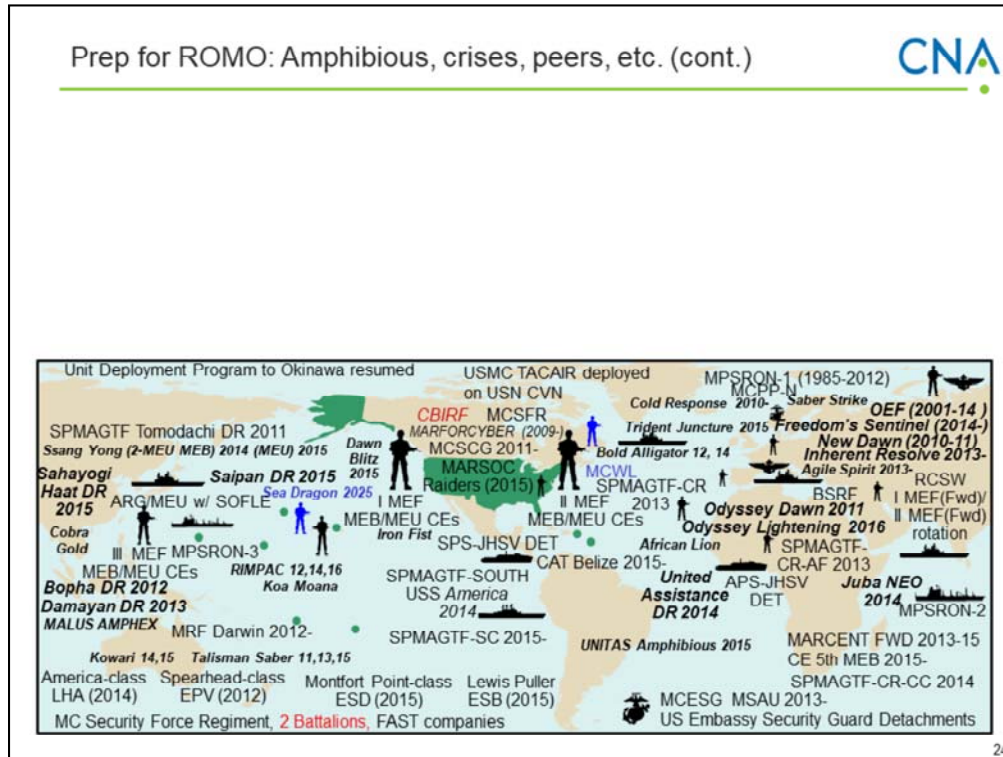
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Marine end strength dropped from 201,000 in 2011 to 184,000 in 2015—still higher, however, than it had been for most of the decade prior to the 9/11 Al Qaeda attacks in 2001. Marine aircraft numbers rose to 1,300, with Marine F/A-18 squadrons still deploying forward periodically on US Navy carriers. A Navy LHA was commissioned in 2014 that was optimized to operate US Marine Corps aviation, including the soon-to-be-operational F-35B STOVL strike fighter.

New specialized and innovative expeditionary support vessels—EPFs, ESDs, and ESBs—also began to enter the US Navy fleet to support Marine operations, as the Marines also explored the possibility of deploying on Navy nonamphibious ships and foreign military support vessels. On the other hand, one MPSRON with forward deployed USMC equipment on board was deactivated (in 2012), and the Marines' troubled Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle (EFV) program was cancelled.

Marines continued to guard US State Department activities overseas and—in the wake of a 2012 attack on the US consulate in Benghazi, Libya—doubled the size of the Marine Corps Embassy Security Group (MCSEG). In 2011, a forward ARG/MEU contributed heavily to Operation Odyssey Dawn—the allied intervention in Libya—especially with sea-based AV-8B Harrier strikes on ground targets.

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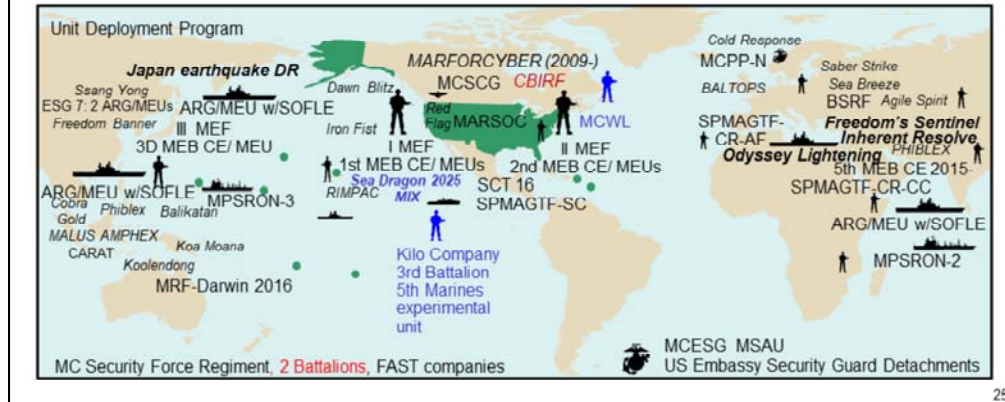


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Forward ARG/MEU sea-based Harriers later struck ISIL targets in Syria and Iraq in 2016 during Operation Inherent Resolve, which also included land-based USMC EA-6B operations. In 2016, Marine MEU Harriers flying off an LHD conducted strikes on ISIL targets in Libya in Operation Odyssey Lightning. Marines also conducted NEOs from Juba, South Sudan, and disaster response operations in Japan, the Philippines, Saipan, and Nepal, and responded to the outbreak of the Ebola virus in 2014 in West Africa (Operation United Assistance).

As the decade wore on, with rising hostility to the US and its allies on the part of near-peer competitors China and Russia, the Marines also began to revisit concepts and capabilities needed for “higher-end” contingencies involving these and similar states. In 2015, a second US Marine general officer was selected as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In his testimony before Congress, he emphasized the significance of the emerging Russian threat. By 2016, the Marines could be said to have adopted a “hedging strategy”: deploying a variety of units and capabilities capable of fighting across the range of military operations (ROMO).

USMC deployment strategy in 2016

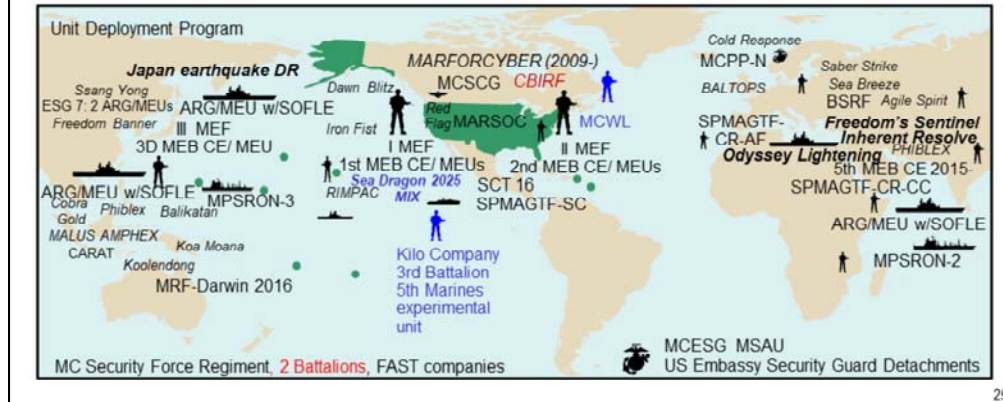


In 2016 the US Marine Corps included three active and one reserve Marine divisions and three active and one reserve Marine air wings. Active duty end strength was 184,000—less than during the peak years of the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but more than any time since 1992. The number of Marines deployed forward was 36,000. The active aircraft inventory was about 1,300—around what it had been during the preceding two decades. MAGTFs included three MEFs, some MEB command elements, seven MEUs (two or three forward at any one time, each with a SOFLE on board), and three forward Special Purpose MAGTFs for crisis response and HA/DR—each very different from the others in size, purpose, and capability. Marine equipment was pre-positioned forward on two squadrons of ships and in caves in Norway.

Marines were still engaged in Afghanistan and Iraq, largely in training and advisory roles. The Marine Rotational Force Darwin exercised in Australia, and the Black Sea Rotational Force did the same in European locations. Forward MEU aircraft participated in strikes on ISIL targets in Syria and Iraq and stood ready to facilitate NEOs. Significantly, Harriers from a deployed ARG's LHD conducted combat air strikes against ISIL targets in Libya in Operation Odyssey Lightning, replicating their accomplishment of five years earlier in Operation Odyssey Dawn. A few months earlier, another MEU's Marines had provided a rapid disaster response to an earthquake on the Japanese island of Kyushu.

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USMC deployment strategy in 2016 (cont.)

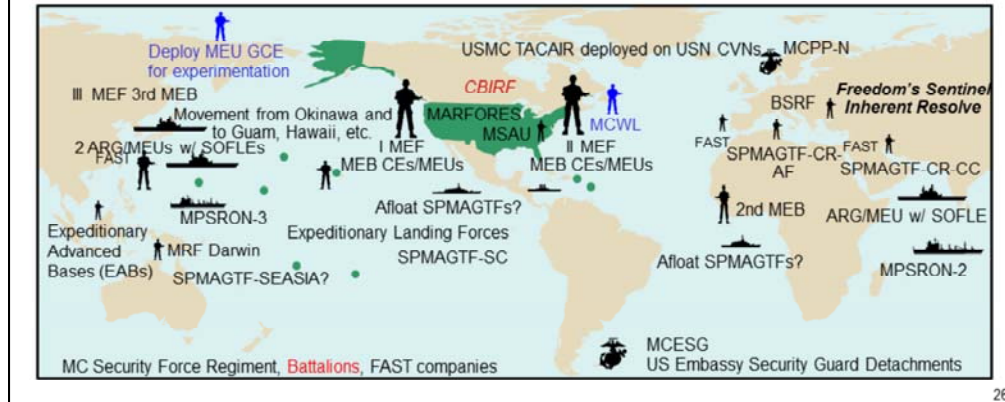


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Marines also participated in an extensive exercise program, including several around the world, with allied and partner forces—notably, a two-MEU exercise in Korea.

Many exercises included US Navy amphibious warships, but some included other US Navy ships serving as platforms for the Marines as well. In Exercise BALTOPS 16, US Marines practiced an amphibious landing in Finland, and in Sea Breeze 2016, they practiced one in Ukraine—both adjacent to Russian territory. New USMC F-35B aircraft exercised for the first time at a US Air Force–hosted Red Flag exercise. Embassy Guard and other Marine security forces were deployed globally and increasing in numbers. Marine Raiders deployed in joint SOCOM operations. Marines continued to guard Navy nuclear weapons at US Navy SSBN bases and elsewhere and to provide the nation with a CBIRF. In 2016, Marine TACAIR strike fighter squadrons returned from deployments on US Navy carriers while others prepared for future deployments. And CMC General Robert Neller launched a new campaign of warfighting experimentation in 2016: Sea Dragon 2025, to explore and experiment with emerging warfighting concepts and prospective capabilities using live forces. A MAGTF Integrated Experiment (MIX) was held in Southern California to test some of these concepts and capabilities using Kilo Company of the newly designated experimental 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, which also retained its role as a deployable MEU ground combat element (GCE).

Future vision: Ready to surge for ROMO

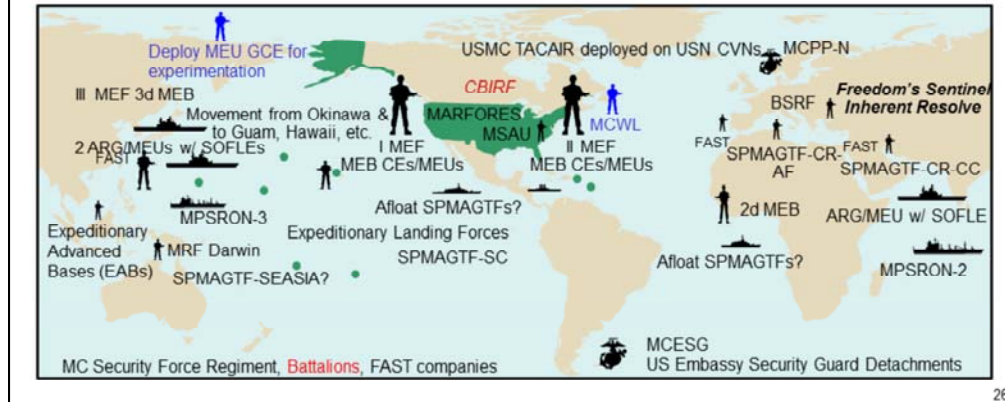


Looking to the future, the Marine Corps of 2016 anticipated

- Continued status as a co-equal US military service, with combat and other capabilities ideally suited to the future global security environment
- Continued requirement for HA/DR, crisis response, amphibious, and combat operations across the range of military operations and throughout the world, including against near-peer and peer competitors
- An active end strength of 182,000, with a third of the force deployed forward, 1,300 aircraft, and a goal of 38 US Navy amphibious ships (2-MEB assault echelon lift for forcible entry operations)
- Continued MAGTF organizational construct, with periodic tweaking of MEFs, MEBs, MEUs, SPMAGTF organizational emphases, compositing
- Increased forward deployment of ARG/MEUs, optimizing them better for CCMD-driven split and disaggregated operations
- 2 ARG/MEUs routinely forward-deployed in WESTPAC, one utilizing Australia
- Continued periodic Marine TACAIR deployments forward on USN carriers, including USMC F-35Cs

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Future vision: Ready to surge for ROMO (cont.)

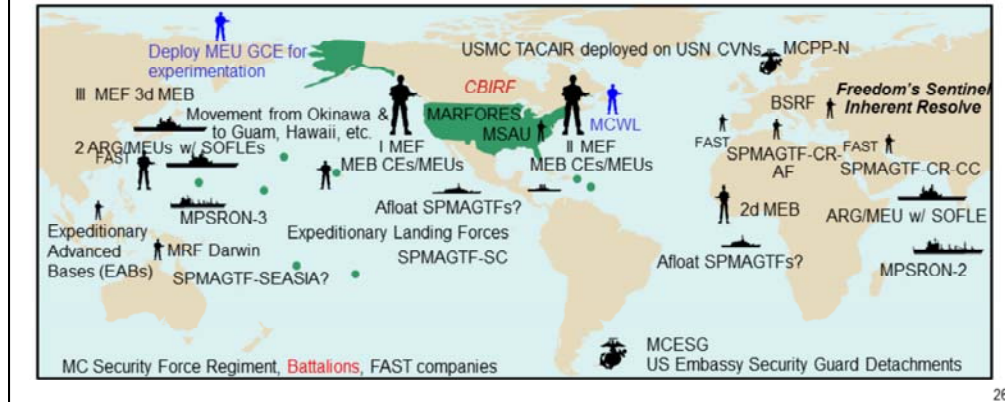


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- Distributed electronic warfare capabilities across the MAGTF and phase-out of the specialized EA-6B force
- Continued efforts to integrate operations with other services and allies, especially with US Navy and US Special Operations Forces
- MAGTF commanders continuing to retain OPCON of organic air assets, providing excess sorties as available to the JFACC for tasking
- Continued and perhaps increased force levels and responsibilities for US embassy and consulate security overseas
- Increased recognition and implementation of USMC roles in naval sea control and sea denial operations—not just power projection operations—including increased USMC interoperability with Navy CWC command and control (C2) practices
- Fewer Marines on Okinawa; more Marines on Guam, Hawaii, Australia
- Innovative use of existing USMC organizations and systems—notably, V-22 Ospreys, Company Landing Teams (CLTs), Security Cooperation Teams
- Evolution of focus from CLTs to Expeditionary Landing Forces

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Future vision: Ready to surge for ROMO (cont.)



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- Eventual fielding of new Amphibious Combat Vehicles, Joint Strike Fighters (F-35Bs/Cs), CH-53K heavy-lift helicopters, Joint Light Tactical Vehicles (JLTVs), new amphibious ship designs, connectors, UAVs, etc.
- Innovative use of new EPF, ESD, ESB, and other nonamphibious ship types.
- Looking out at the future and responding by standing up and testing small experimental operational, organizational, and technological capabilities, and then pursuing those that show the most promise (e.g., MCWL using a MEU GCE as an experimentation force)
- Improved capabilities to establish forward Expeditionary Advanced Bases (EABs)
- Improved information warfare capabilities, even at the expense of other capabilities
- Occasional defense support of civil authorities (DSCA) within the US homeland
- Possibility of sustained combat operations ashore, alongside the Army, as in the past.

Deployment strategy vision: Ready to surge for ROMO 

- USMC will maintain
 - 3 active ready divisions, air wings
 - MAGTF CONOPS, but will adjust MEF, MEF (FWD), MEB, MEU, SPMAGTF emphases, disaggregation
 - East Coast, West Coast, Far East hubs
 - Rapid forward surge capabilities
- USMC deployment strategy is to maintain a flexible global hedging posture: some of everything
 - CMC General Neller: “We do not have the luxury of focusing on one identity, paradigm, or capability”

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- Marines will continually flex, adjust, and reemphasize among
 - Range of threats, including peer competitors
 - Range of naval missions: amphibious, but also strike, AAW, ASUW, etc.
 - Ready global crisis response, including HA/DR, by any means
 - Foreign training and advising
 - Sustained ops ashore alongside Army (conventional, COIN, occupation)
 - Increased forward presence/prepositioning, ashore and afloat
 - Maximize rapid surge capability by air and sea
 - Specific-focus regions for combat and engagement
 - Integrated Marines/aircraft on Navy ships, air wings, task forces, fleets
 - Integrated with SOF, especially at sea and forward
 - Expeditionary Advanced Base seizure and defense/DSCA
 - MAGTF EW capabilities, including space and cyber domains
 - Experimentation and exercises for future operations
 - Experiment w/new capabilities, missions, units; discard when OBE

- USN had no idea of its deployment strategy history and didn't care
 - CNA study briefings occasion several "Aha!" moments
- USMC knows theirs well and cherry picks it often
 - CNA study briefings occasion head nods and "So What?" themes
- USN's "two-hub combat-credible forward presence" (CCFP) deployment strategy has been its essence, its central organizing concept, for 70 years
- USMC's essence and central organizing concepts are readiness and crisis response, amphibious warfare, ground war participation, and the MAGTF. Its deployment strategy keeps changing
- USN is so wedded to CCFP that it cannot conceive of alternative ways of deploying the fleet
- USMC constantly scanning for the next deployment strategy

This report was written by CNA's Strategy, Policy, Plans, and Programs Division (SP3).

SP3 provides strategic and political-military analysis informed by regional expertise to support operational and policy-level decision-makers across the Department of the Navy, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the unified combatant commands, the intelligence community, and domestic agencies. The division leverages social science research methods, field research, regional expertise, primary language skills, Track 1.5 partnerships, and policy and operational experience to support senior decision-makers.

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