



UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
U.S. MARINE CORPS FORCES CENTRAL COMMAND
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IN REPLY REFER TO:
5800
CDR
19 May 21

From: Commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command
To: Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps

Subj: COMMAND INVESTIGATION INTO THE FORMING OF THE 15TH MARINE
EXPEDITIONARY UNIT ASSOCIATED WITH AN ASSAULT AMPHIBIOUS VEHICLE
MISHAP THAT OCCURRED OFF OF SAN CLEMENTE ISLAND ON JULY 30, 2020

Ref: (a) JAGINST 5800.7G (JAGMAN), Chapter II
(b) Manual for Courts-Martial (2019 ed.)
(c) Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) 's ltr 5830 ff of 8 Jan 2021
(d) CMC PPO msg 092116Z Apr 21 (Requirements for the Resumption of AAV Water
Operations)

Encl: (1) Gen Thomas's ltr 5800 ACMC of 2 Apr 21
(2) MajGen Olson's ltr 5800 DMCS of 8 Apr 21
(3) List of Witnesses
(4) Marine Corps Reference Publication (MCR-P) 1-10.1
(5) I MEF FY 20-21 Campaign Plan (S//REL TO USA, FVEY)
(6) I MEF TEEP for FY19 and FY20
(7) 1st Marine Division Campaign Plan
(8) I MEF Q2 Summit, 17 January 2020 (S//NF)
(9) I MEF Q3 Summit, 24 April 2020 (S//NF)
(10) I MEF Q4 Summit, 22 July 2020 (S//NF)
(11) Interview of LtGen Joseph L. Osterman, USMC (ret.)
(12) Interview of BGen Roberta L. Shea, USMC
(13) Interview of MajGen Kevin M. Iiams, USMC
(14) Division Warfighting Seminar Consolidated Brief, 20 Feb 2020
(15) CMC WASHINGTON DC 070130Z Mar 20 (MARADMIN 150/20)
(16) Interrogatories of MajGen Robert F. Castellvi, USMC of 25 Apr 21
(17) Interview of Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC
(18) Interview of Col Seth W. Folsom, USMC
(19) Interrogatories of Col Christopher J. Bronzi, USMC
(20) Interview of Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC (ret.)
(21) Interview of Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC
(22) Interview of BGen Thomas B. Savage, USMC
(23) WHO Director-General's Statement on Novel Coronavirus, 30 Jan 20
(24) CDC's Statement on Response to COVID-19, 12 Feb 21
(25) COVID-19 Directives and Policy Matrix (CUI)
(26) USD (P&R) memo, Force Health Protection Guidance for the Novel Coronavirus Outbreak,
30 January 2020
(27) USD (P&R) memo, Force Health Protection Guidance (Supplement 1) - Department of
Defense Guidance for Monitoring Personnel Returning from China During the Novel
Coronavirus Outbreak, 7 February 2020
(28) CMC WASHINGTON DC 112111Z Feb 20 (MARADMIN 082/20)
(29) USD (P&R) memo, Force Health Protection (Supplement 2) - Department of Defense

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- Guidance for Military Installation Commanders' Risk-Based Measured Response to the Novel Coronavirus Outbreak, 25 February 2020
- (30) SECDEF memo, Travel Restrictions for DoD Components in Response to Coronavirus Disease 2019, 11 March 2020
 - (31) SECNAV WASHINGTON DC 121914Z Mar 20 (ALNAV 025/20)
 - (32) CMC WASHINGTON DC 130130Z Mar 20 (MARADMIN 162/20)
 - (33) Gen Berger's ltr CMC of 12 Mar 20 (White Letter 1-20)
 - (34) DEPSECDEF memo, Stop Movement for all Domestic Travel for DoD Components in Response to Coronavirus Disease 2019, 13 March 2020
 - (35) SECNAV WASHINGTON DC 142035Z Mar 20 (ALNAV 026/20)
 - (36) CMC WASHINGTON DC 140450Z Mar 20 (MARADMIN 167/20)
 - (37) I MEF EXORD ISO SECFOR USNS MERCY
 - (38) I MEF Order 1050.2, I Marine Expeditionary Force Coronavirus Disease 2019 Leave and Liberty Order, 30 Mar 20
 - (39) SECDEF memo, Modification and Reissuance of DoD Response to Coronavirus Disease 2019 - Travel Restrictions, 20 April 2020
 - (40) I MEF OPOrd 20-001, I MEF COVID-19 Response, 6 Apr 20 (U//FOUO)
 - (41) San Diego Union-Tribune article, "Marines Establish Camp Pendleton Task Force, Coronavirus Isolation Center," 25 Mar 20
 - (42) SECDEF memo, Transition to Conditions-based Phased Approach to Coronavirus Disease 2019 Personnel Movement and Travel Restrictions, 22 May 2020
 - (43) CMC WASHINGTON DC 052305Z Jun 20 (MARADMIN 333/20)
 - (44) I MEF Order 1050.3, I Marine Expeditionary Force Coronavirus Disease 2019 Leave and Liberty Order, 25 Jun 20
 - (45) SECDEF memo, Exemption of Authorized Leave for Department of Defense Service Members from Coronavirus Disease 2019 Personnel Movement and Travel Restrictions, 29 June 2020
 - (46) I MEF FRAGO 010 to OPOrd 20-001, 29 Jun 20 (U//FOUO)
 - (47) CMC WASHINGTON DC 011115Z Jul 20 (MARADMIN 377/20)
 - (48) I MEF Order 1050.4, I Marine Expeditionary Force Coronavirus Disease 2019 Leave and Liberty Order, 9 Jul 20
 - (49) I MEF Policy Letter 7-20, Execution of Ceremonies During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), 17 Jul 20
 - (50) Interview of MGySgt (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC
 - (51) I MEF Order 3120.9A, I MEF MEU SOP, 7 Nov 17
 - (52) MARCENT Native Fury 20 FPC Brief (S//NF)
 - (53) NF20 Command Element December Training LOI
 - (54) 1st Marine Division WARNO in Support of Exercise Native Fury 20
 - (55) LtCol (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) email of 21 Apr 21
 - (56) MCO 3502.3C, Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) Pre-Deployment Training Program (PTP), 13 Sep 19
 - (57) Interview of LtCol (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC
 - (58) Interview of Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC (ret.)
 - (59) I MEF EOTG Table of Organization
 - (60) LtGen Ottignon email of 23 Apr 21
 - (61) General Officer CY11-21 Slate to ADC/AWC
 - (62) Interview of Col Kevin E. Clark, USMC
 - (63) Interview of LtCol (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC
 - (64) Col Clark ltr 1000 CO of 6 Mar 20, Delegation of Authority to Sign "Acting"

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- (65) LtCol Brenize Statement to Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)
- (66) Native Fury 2020 Individual Augment Reporting Instructions
- (67) CG, I MEF Letter of Instruction for 15th MEU Deployment 21-1, 30 Dec 19 (S//REL TO USA, FVEY)
- (68) Interview of Maj (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC
- (69) 1st Marine Division Requirement Tables
- (70) Interview of MGySgt (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC
- (71) Interview of LtCol (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC
- (72) Interview of Maj (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC
- (73) 3d AA Bn Table of Organization
- (74) Interview of CWO4 (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC
- (75) MCO 3120.13, Policy for Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU), 29 Oct 15
- (76) Interview of LtCol (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC
- (77) CG, I MEF's 15th MEU MAGTF Design Planning Guidance ISO 21-1 Deployment (S//REL TO USA, FVEY)
- (78) Mod 002 to CG, I MEF Letter of Instruction for 15th MEU Deployment 21-1, 22 Jul 20 (S//REL TO USA, FVEY)
- (79) Interview of Maj (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC
- (80) Interview of LtCol (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC
- (81) 1st Marine Division TEEP FY20-21
- (82) BLT 1/4 Composite AAR
- (83) 15th MEU E-270/240 Man, Train and Equip Brief, 11 Mar 20 (S//NF)
- (84) 15th MEU E-211 Forming and PTP Brief, 13 Apr 20 (S//NF)
- (85) Mod 001 to CG, I MEF Letter of Instruction for 15th MEU Deployment 21-1, 12 Jul 20 (S//REL TO USA, FVEY)
- (86) Interview of Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC
- (87) Interview of Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC (ret.)
- (88) Interview of Maj (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC
- (89) Memorandum for the Record from Maj (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)
- (90) CG MCCDC QUANTICO VA 251350Z May 18 (MARADMIN 293/18)
- (91) NAVMC 3500.2C w/CH1, Assault Amphibious Vehicle Training and Readiness Manual, 14 May 17
- (92) I MEF UET Policy 1-20
- (93) Interview of Maj (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC
- (94) Interview of Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC
- (95) 13th MEU E-180 Brief (S//REL TO USA, FVEY)
- (96) 11th MEU E-254 Forming and PTP Brief, 23 Nov 2020 (S//REL TO USA, FVEY)
- (97) I MEF 2020 UET Utilization
- (98) MCO 3501.1E, Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation (MCCRE), 25 Feb 19
- (99) LtCol (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) 's email of 12 May 21
- (100) 1st Marine Division Order 3501.1D, Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation (MCCRE), 30 Apr 15
- (101) MCO 4790.2, Field-Level Maintenance Management Policy (FLMMP), 21 Jan 16
- (102) AAV Op Status 202004-202007
- (103) 15th MEU Readiness Timeline
- (104) MCO 3000.13B, Marine Corps Readiness Reporting, 14 Jul 20
- (105) Interview of Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC (ret.)
- (106) 1st MARDIV DRRS-MC Reports, January-April 2020 (SECRET)
- (107) Interview of Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC

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- (108) SITREPs (9) dated January to June 2020
- (109) MFR from MGySgt (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) re: MCTIMS Search for 2d AA BN MCCRE
- (110) MCO 4400.160, Field Supply and Maintenance Analysis Office (FSMAO) Program, 26 Nov 13
- (111) 3d AA Bn FSMAO Final Report 2017
- (112) 3d AA Bn FSMAO Final Report 2019
- (113) 1st Marine Division Order 5041.3G, 1st Marine Division Logistics Readiness Evaluation (LRE), 23 Mar 15
- (114) 3d AA Bn LRE Supply Checklist 2020
- (115) 3d AA Bn LRE MMO Checklist 2020
- (116) 3d AA Bn LRE Ordnance Checklist 2020
- (117) 3d AA Bn LRE CG Outbrief
- (118) Interview of LtCol (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c), USMC
- (119) 1st Marine Division Order 5041.21M, Commanding General's Inspection Program, 11 Jun 15
- (120) 3d AAV Bn CGI, 29 May 20
- (121) Battalion Vision Statement
- (122) Email from AA Bn S-4 to XO of 12 Nov
- (123) 3d AA Bn T/O Reorg PPT (12 Nov)
- (124) Email from AA Bn S-4 to Bn leadership
- (125) Mods PPT Slide
- (126) LtGen Osterman email of 2 May 21
- (127) Interrogatories of MajGen Robert F. Castellvi, USMC of 3 May 21
- (128) MajGen Iiams email of 2 May 21
- (129) BGen Savage email of 2 May 21
- (130) BGen Shea email of 2 May 21
- (131) I MEF Materiel Readiness Brief (FSMAO), 27 Mar 20
- (132) 3d AA Bn Administrative Deadline (ADL) Program Letter of Instruction, 3 May 19
- (133) 3d AA Bn CGI, 24 Jul 18
- (134) Captain (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)'s Itr IO of 23 Aug 19
- (135) Interview of Mr. (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)
- (136) Joint Limited Technical Inspection for AAVs 1-14
- (137) AAV Platoon Commander Statement
- (138) Memorandum for the Record from MGySgt (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c), Validation of MCCRE for 3d AABn
- (139) Memorandum for the Record from MGySgt (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c), UET Utilization and Scheduling Verification for FY20
- (140) MEF Decision Paper dtd 9 Oct 2019 (S//REL TO USA, FVEY)
- (141) AAV Serial Number Custody 202001-202009
- (142) Battalion Order P3000.1J, Standard Operating Procedure for Assault Amphibian Operations of 25 Oct 2019 (Common SOP for AA OPS)
- (143) V14 MCCRE Confirmation Brief AFX 2-20 of 22 Jan 2020
- (144) MFR Email between Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) and Mr. (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) of 30 Apr 20
- (145) 3d AA Bn MM Policy Letter 8-19 of 17 May 19
- (146) E0846 GCSS-MC Historical Measures
- (147) MFR Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) and Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) of 14 May 20
- (148) 3d AA Bn LRE CG Out-Brief Initial Look of May 15, 2020
- (149) Email between Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) and Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) of 14 May 2021
- (150) Memorandum for the Record from MGySgt (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c), Request for Information for II

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MEF and 2d MarDiv MCCRE and UET Orders

- (151) Email between Col (b)(3), (b)(6) and Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7) of 14 May 2021
- (152) 3d AA Bn FSMAO Outbrief_v2
- (153) 3d AA Bn FSMAO CG Outbrief
- (154) 3d AA Bn LRE Summary
- (155) 1st Marine Division Order 4790.2 Maintenance Management Standard Operating Procedures Excerpt
- (156) Email from LtCol (b)(3), (b)(6) to Col (b)(3), (b)(6) of 14 May 2021
- (157) LOI Task Organization of the 15th MEU
- (158) Email from 15th MEU MMC of 21 April 2020
- (159) Exercise IRON FIST

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

1. The Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps (ACMC) appointed me, in enclosure (1), to conduct a command investigation into the facts and circumstances surrounding the forming of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) associated with an assault amphibian vehicle (AAV) mishap that occurred off the coast of San Clemente Island on July 30, 2020. Specifically, enclosure (1) directed that I investigate the facts and circumstances surrounding: (1) forming and compositing of the 15th MEU, (2) training and materiel readiness surrounding the formation and compositing of the 15th MEU, and (3) I Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) oversight of the 15th MEU. Enclosure (1) further directed that I address the decisions impacting these subject matters, the discharge of supervisory and oversight responsibility exercised by the command up to the MEF level, and COVID-19 impacts. This report addresses all the requisite topics in enclosure (1) in accordance with references (a) and (b). In light of the thoroughness of reference (c), the corrective actions directed in reference (d), and the high-level focus of this investigation, I offer several recommendations at the conclusion of this report for further consideration.
2. I extend my deepest sympathy and condolences to the families, friends, and loved ones of Private First Class Bryan J. Baltierra, Lance Corporal Marco A. Barranco, Private First Class Evan A. Bath, Navy Hospital Corpsman 3d Class (Fleet Marine Force) Christopher Gnem, Lance Corporal Jack-Ryan Ostrovsky, Lance Corporal Guillermo S. Perez, Corporal Wesley A. Rodd, Lance Corporal Chase A. Sweetwood, and Corporal Cesar A. Villanueva. Our fellow Marines and Sailor will never be forgotten. We also extend our thoughts to the Marines injured in this mishap, Lance Corporal (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) and Lance Corporal (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c). The AAV mishap on July 30, 2020 was a tragic mishap stemming from a confluence of events, and this investigation into a segment of those events was conducted with their sacrifices in mind. Ultimately this investigation aims not to excuse or rationalize any decision or action but to prevent similar mishaps in the future.
3. The Staff Director of the Marine Corps (SDMC) appointed in writing additional members of the investigation team, in enclosure (2), to provide the requisite investigative support and subject matter expertise. The date of this letter is erroneously marked March 8, 2021 and was actually signed on April 8, 2021.
4. The original suspense for this investigation was May 3, 2021. I asked for and received a three day extension from the ACMC through May 5, 2021. The time from May 5 - 18, 2021 was provided for additional editing and coordination.
5. The investigation team interviewed 47 witnesses during the course of this investigation. Forty-three occurred via live or telephonic interviews, two via written interrogatories, and two declined to provide

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statements pursuant to Article 31(b), UCMJ. The witnesses were mostly I MEF and 1st Marine Division (1st MARDIV) key staff, and we also interviewed key staff from 3d Marine Aircraft Wing (3d MAW), 1st Marine Logistics Group (1st MLG), and II MEF to establish a baseline of how MEUs are composited within I MEF and at II MEF. I also interviewed the commanding generals (CG) within I MEF who served on and before July 30, 2020. Additionally, the investigation team reviewed the witness interviews in reference (c) and incorporated them as necessary in this investigation. The list of witnesses conducted during this investigation is included at enclosure (3).

6. All personally identifiable information reviewed during the conduct of this investigation was collected from official records.

7. I did not conduct an additional investigation into the events on July 30, 2020; rather, the scope of this investigation centered on the pre-mishap timeframe, including processes, contributing factors, and decisions to understand the events that contributed to the mishap and resulting injuries and loss of life. Throughout this investigation, I made an effort to understand the overall environment and resulting influences on the role of the higher headquarters up to the MEF level, including authority, responsibility, direction, and oversight of the 15th MEU's forming and compositing.

8. As a matter of due diligence, I identified matters that are outside the scope of this investigation, yet may warrant potential review by other entities such as Marine Corps Forces, Pacific (MARFORPAC), Marine Corps Forces Command (MARFORCOM), Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC), and Training and Education Command (TECOM). For similar reasons, I did not assess U.S. Navy actions associated with this mishap, as I understand the Navy is conducting a separate review. It is worth noting, however, that the consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak and associated reverberations from the USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT incident compressed and complicated available training opportunities for the 15th MEU.

9. Sometimes referred to as the "crown jewel," MEUs are the most iconic Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) the Marine Corps trains, composites, and allocates on a regular basis in support of geographic combatant command (GCC) requirements. The Marine Corps has seven standing MEUs: 31st MEU in Japan; 11th, 13th, and 15th on the west coast, and 22d, 24th, and 26th on the east coast. The force generation cycle of a MEU consists of two distinct time periods leading up to the deployment: (1) when the MEF's air, ground and logistical support major subordinate commands (MSC) organize, train, and equip units to provide to the MEU, and (2) the 26-week predeployment training program (PTP) after the change in operational posture (CHOP) of the MSCs' units to the newly composited MEU. Marine Corps Order (MCO) 3502.3C explicitly charges Commander, MARFORCOM, and the Commander, MARFORPAC with implementing the PTP, and both commanders are also responsible for providing a MEU commander with core mission essential tasks (MET)-trained units that are properly trained and equipped to safely, effectively, and efficiently execute the PTP.

10. The main body of this report is organized by findings of fact (FoF) followed by opinions and recommendations. The FoFs begin with a review of the steady state environment in and around I MEF including the impact of COVID-19. The next sections discuss risk and institutional trends related to amphibious operations. Then, the FOFs review the key leaders, gaps in leadership positions, and pivotal decisions related to this investigation. The following section broadly describes how the Marine Corps composites a MEU and more specifically how I MEF organized, trained, and equipped the 15th MEU. Next, the report details the two fundamental efforts associated with compositing the 15th MEU: training and materiel readiness. The training reviewed includes Underwater Egress Training (UET) and mission-specific training for 1/4 and the AA platoon to include relevant evaluations such as the Marine Corps

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Combat Readiness Evaluation (MCCRE). The materiel readiness section focuses on 3d AA Battalion (Bn) and how the vehicles provided to the 15th MEU were prepared and inspected.

FINDINGS OF FACT

I MEF STEADY STATE ENVIRONMENT

1. The Marine Corps generally operates as MAGTFs, which are integrated, combined arms forces that include air, ground, and logistics units under a single commander. MAGTFs are organized, trained, and equipped from the operating forces of MARFORPAC, MARFORCOM, and Marine Forces Reserve. The Commanders of MARFORPAC and MARFORCOM have responsibility through two parallel chains of command to the Service (as a force provider) and to the GCCs (as a force employer). [Encl (4)]
2. On July 30, 2020, I MEF was one of the Marine Corps' three standing MEFs, comprised of 53,000 Marines and Sailors in California and Arizona, and reported to MARFORPAC. I MEF's mission is to provide the Marine Corps with a globally responsive, expeditionary, and fully scalable MAGTF, capable of generating, deploying, and employing ready forces and formations for crisis response, forward presence, major combat operations, and campaigns. Below I MEF are the MSCs as well as other MAGTF formations including the 15th MEU. [Encl (4)]
3. I MEF's FY20-21 Campaign Plan established that I MEF must be ready to provide MAGTFs to the United States Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) and United States Central Command (CENTCOM) Combatant Commanders to execute priority operational plans (OPLAN) and global force management (GFM) deployments. I MEF prepared forces by conducting regular training, service level training exercise (SLTEs), large scale exercises (LSE) with the U.S. Navy, and internal exercises. [Encl (5)]
4. During late 2019 and early 2020, I MEF operated at a high operational tempo (OPTEMPO) designed to prepare units to fulfill operational tasks and potential employment for combat operations. Examples of routine and recurring events were MEF-level events such as the I MEF and 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) Command Post Exercises; Service and Joint events such as Mountain Warfare Exercise, Integrated Training Exercise (ITX), Adversary Force Exercise (AFX), and Weapons and Tactics Instruction (WTI); MSC-level events such as STEEL KNIGHT (SK), WINTER FURY, and ARCTIC EDGE; theater security cooperation with partner forces to include RIM OF THE PACIFIC, and sourcing forces to support GCC requirements. The latter included training and deployments such as Special Purpose MAGTF Crisis Response Central Command (SPMAGTF-CR-CC), Marine Rotational Force-Darwin, Unit Deployment Program (UDP), and MEUs. [Encl (6)]
5. I MEF coordinated and executed 11 significant events from October 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020 involving nearly 18,000 service members. The event with the number of personnel involved in each are as follows: ITX 1-20 (3,000); 11th MEU (1,300); 31st MEU 20.1 (1,300); 15th MEU CHOP (1,300); SPMAGTF-CR-CC 19.2 (1,019); SK 2020 (7,064); South West Border Security (1,150); ITX 2-20 (900); SPMAGTF-CR-CC 20.1 (1,019); ITX 3-20 (900); Exercise NATIVE FURY 2020 (NF20) (1,003). [Encl (156)]
6. The CG, I MEF conducted a change of command on July 31, 2020, and retired on August 1, 2020. [Encl (11)]

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7. The CG, I MEF conducted quarterly MEF Summits on January 17, 2020, April 24, 2020, and July 22, 2020. The purpose of the MEF Summits was to synchronize actions and planning efforts across the MEF and with the base as well as provide a forum for open dialogue and discussion among the commanders and staffs. [Encls (8), (9), (10)]

8. The CG, I MEF; MSC CGs; CG, Marine Corps Installation-West, and key staff members from each attended the summits. [Encls (8), (9) and (10)]

9. The topics on the agendas included the MEF Warfighting Concept, review of I MEF Campaign Plan, lines of operations, readiness scorecards, and significant issues in order to ensure shared understanding and to synchronize efforts. [Encls (8), (9) and (10)]

10. A significant topic during the Q2 (January 2020) Summit was the I MEF response to the Iranian crisis. Additionally, one of the briefs included changes to the standard MEU deployment model based upon the MEU 2030 concept in the Commandant of the Marine Corps' (CMC) Force Design. [Encl (8)]

11. The first topic of discussion during the Q3 (April 2020) and Q4 (July 2020) Summits was COVID-19 that included an assessment of the impacts across the MEF and installations. Impacts annotated specifically in the Q3 brief included the establishment of the medical isolation and observation center (MIOC) on Marine Corps Base (MCB) Camp Pendleton; support to the United States Navy Ship (USNS) MERCY; mitigating delays to the GFM deployments; cancellation of SLTE 3-20 at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) at 29 Palms; I MEF support to COVID mitigation efforts at Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD) San Diego; adjusting deployment dates for Task Forces ELLIS and KOA MOANA; the U.S. Navy's LSE-20 and LSE-21; postponed planning for the INDOPACOM joint exercise program; and implementation of risk management controls. [Encls (9) and (10)]

12. The I MEF Summit on April 24, 2020 discussed significant challenges in the 180 days ahead. One of the specific challenges discussed was reduced availability of amphibious shipping and the associated negative effects on training. [Encl (9)]

13. The CG, I MEF, stated he had frequent informal and formal opportunities for communicating with his staff and subordinate commanders, including quarterly commanders conferences, materiel readiness briefs, and monthly combat readiness briefs centered on Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS) reporting. [Encl (11)]

14. The CG, I MEF stated that he prioritized GFM requirements first, then OPLAN readiness, followed by routine training. [Encl (11)]

15. The CG, 1st MLG and CG, 3d MAW stated they received clear guidance from the CG, I MEF regarding priorities, including prioritization of support to the 15th MEU. [Encls (12) and (13)]

16. The 1st MARDIV Campaign Plan established three lines of effort (LOE): (1) deploy and fight the division (i.e., OPLAN readiness); (2) generate, deploy, and redeploy forces (i.e., GFM and service requirements); and (3) readiness. The CG, 1st MARDIV also provided his guidance on "The Combat Ready Bench" further clarifying, "leaders in the Blue Diamond need to aggressively and creatively pursue ways to flatten the staffing model to optimize readiness, maintaining a combat ready bench – year round, through all phases of PTP, deployment, and redeployment. Realizing this expectation starts with embracing the ready mindset and the reality that the Marine Corps' status quo manning practices do not support the combat ready bench." [Encl (7)]

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17. The CG, 1st MARDIV conducted quarterly Blue Diamond Warfighting Seminars to ensure a common picture among leaders and to enhance communications and coordination. [Encl (14)]

18. The CG, 1st MARDIV conducted a Warfighting Seminar on February 26, 2020 that included instruction on DRRS and Marine Corps Training Information Management System (MCTIMS), Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV) Fielding, and Littoral Combat Ship-USMC Interoperability. Other agenda items included updates on CENTCOM operations and related intelligence, dynamic force employment, personnel retention, fielding of the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle, Corpsman Assault Pack, and strategic communications. [Encl (14)]

19. The Q3 Division Warfighting Seminar scheduled for May 2020 was cancelled due to COVID risk mitigation. [Encls (15), (40)]

20. The CG, 1st MARDIV provided the I MEF CG with a monthly detailed situation report (SITREP) and participated in a weekly commanders secure video teleconference (SVTC) with the CG, I MEF. These regularly scheduled touchpoints provided him the opportunity to update the CG, I MEF on the division's current and future operations and issues. [Encl (16)]

21. The CG, 1st MARDIV stated the CG, I MEF and other MSC CGs coordinated on a continuous basis through battle rhythm events. [Encl (16)]

22. The CG, 1st MARDIV stated that during the first half of 2020 his two mission essential LOEs focused on readiness for major combat operations and support to GFM requirements, with an additional LOE for the foundational organize, train, and equip tasks. [Encl (16)]

23. The CG, 1st MARDIV stated that his regular battle rhythm included monthly office calls with the division's colonel and separate lieutenant colonel commanders and monthly SITREPs from those commanders. He chaired monthly "Commanders SVTCs," where each colonel and separate lieutenant colonel commander briefed him and his staff in detail on current/future training and operations, retention efforts, and readiness levels. He also received monthly briefs on DRRS and materiel readiness. [Encl (16)]

24. The overall command climate within I MEF and its MSCs and major subordinate elements (MSE), including 15th MEU was positive and professional, characterized by strong teamwork, cohesion, and cooperation. [Encls (11) - (13), (16) - (22)].

Onset of COVID-19 and Adjustments

25. The CG, I MEF stated that the COVID policy direction from higher headquarters changed frequently, sometimes within the same week. [Encl (11)]

26. In the month of March 2020, I MEF coordinated the operational employment, deployment, and recovery of approximately 12,000 Marines and Sailors. [Encl (11)]

27. The CG, 1st MARDIV stated that from February to July 2020, the most significant challenge was overcoming the uncertainty associated with COVID precautions and restrictions, supporting the planning and activities for I MEF COVID mitigation, and generating additional capabilities to support COVID requirements while supporting and attempting to salvage the training and readiness opportunities

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impacted by the pandemic. The most readily apparent impact of COVID mitigation policies was the restriction of movement (ROM) policies, which strained facilities. [Encl (16)]

28. The CG, 1st MARDIV stated that he participated in the daily (eventually weekly) I MEF COVID Commanders Update, which enabled him to convey concerns about the impact of COVID mitigation on the Division. [Encl (16)]

29. The CG, 1st MARDIV stated that COVID-19 policies affected training and readiness because training and readiness events were curtailed, to include the postponement, modification and/or cancellation of all events during the month of April, which included training events, planning conferences, and inspections at the Service and Division level. [Encl (16)]

30. The CO, 15th MEU assessed that the most significant challenge experienced by the MSEs as I MEF prepared to composite the 15th MEU was COVID; he explained that timelines were compressed, adjustments to the conduct of training were implemented, and schedules had to be modified. In particular the dates, locations and scope of the Realistic Urban Training (RUT) and Amphibious Squadron (PHIBRON) MEU Integration Training (PMINT) events were changed. [Encls (19), (67), (85)]

31. The World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency of international concern on January 30, 2020, WHO's highest level of alarm. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began its agency-wide response to the COVID-19 pandemic on January 21, 2020. [Encls (23), (24)]

32. Between January 30, 2020 and July 30, 2020, the Department of Defense (DOD), Department of the Navy (DON), HQMC, MARFORPAC, and I MEF released more than 100 orders, directives, policies, and guidance related to force protection and the domestic and international response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many are listed below in chronological order; due to the dynamic nature of the COVID-19 response, most of these orders and directives were published within days of each other. [Encl (25)]

33. On January 30, 2020, the acting Under Secretary of Defense (USD) for Personnel and Readiness (P&R) released initial guidance regarding the COVID-19 outbreak, which discussed the situation, risk to personnel, healthcare guidance, patient screening and isolation, diagnosis, treatment, and reportable medical events. [Encl (26)]

34. On February 7, 2020, the acting USD P&R released guidance pertaining to service members returning from China after February 2, 2020. The guidance stated that the DOD must immediately take measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within the department. [Encl (27)]

35. On February 11, 2020, Marine Administrative Message (MARADMIN) 82/20 directed all commanders to plan and take preparatory and precautionary actions to ensure that an outbreak of COVID-19 did not incapacitate Marine Corps forces, installations, or facilities, and to execute plans and procedures to improve force health protection and readiness if COVID-19 was introduced on Marine Corps installations and facilities, or within the Fleet Marine Force. [Encl (28)]

36. On February 25, 2020, the acting USD P&R released additional COVID-19 guidance, which outlined a risk-based framework to guide planning, posture, and actions needed to protect DOD personnel and support mission assurance. [Encl (29)]

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37. MARADMIN 150/20, released on March 7, 2020, required approval by a Deputy Commandant, Marine Force Commander, or CG, MEF for all official travel to Outside of the Continental United States (OCONUS) locations with declared public health emergencies or for which the CDC had issued a travel advisory. MARADMIN 150/20 further required approval by the first general officer (GO) in the chain of command for leave requests to areas with a declared public health emergency or for which the CDC had issued a travel advisory, and for conferences and other gatherings of personnel from disparate locations. [Encl (15)]

38. On March 11, 2020, the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) directed that, effective March 13, 2020, all DOD personnel were to stop movement for 60 days to, from, or through CDC Travel Health Notices (THN) Level 3 (COVID-19) designated locations, including for personal leave and other non-official travel. [Encl (30)]

39. The March 11, 2020 SECDEF guidance also directed DOD components to determine whether official travel by personnel to locations other than CDC THN Level 3 designated locations was mission-essential and to defer non-mission essential travel. Authority to grant exceptions, which had to be in writing, could be delegated no lower than the first general or flag officer or member of the senior executive service (SES) in the traveler's chain of command. [Encl (30)]

40. The Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) and CMC subsequently implemented the SECDEF's 11 March policy on March 12 and 13, 2020. [Encls (31), (32)]

41. On March 12, 2020, the CMC released a White Letter directing all CGs, commanding officers (CO), officers-in-charge, and senior enlisted leaders to closely scrutinize what travel during was mission-essential, what large gatherings such as school graduations should be curtailed or modified, and to take all measures to protect Marines, Sailors, and their families to the greatest extent possible, commensurate with current guidance and the situation on the ground. [Encl (33)]

42. On March 13, 2020, the Deputy SECDEF directed DOD personnel to stop movement for all domestic travel from March 16 to May 11, 2020. This included permanent change of station (PCS) and temporary duty. [Encl (34)]

43. The Deputy SECDEF's stop movement order permitted exceptions for travel that was mission-essential, necessary for humanitarian reasons, or warranted due to extreme hardship. Approval to grant exceptions could be delegated no lower than the first flag or GO or member of the SES in the traveler's chain of command and were to be made on a case-by-case basis, be limited in number, and be coordinated between the gaining and losing organization, as appropriate. [Encl (34)]

44. The SECNAV and CMC subsequently implemented the Deputy SECDEF's stop movement order on March 14, 2020. [Encls (35), (36)]

45. On March 27, 2020, the CG, I MEF issued I MEF Execute Order (EXORD) In Support of Security Forces Deployment In Support of USNS MERCY Defense Support to Civil Authorities. [Encl (37)]

46. On March 30, 2020, the CG, I MEF, released I MEF Order 1050.2, the I MEF COVID-19 leave and liberty order, which restricted leave and liberty for all I MEF personnel and required all requests for leave where the leave destination was not the Marine's or Sailor's primary residence to be approved by the first GO in the chain of command. [Encl (38)]

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47. I MEF Order 1050.2 also prohibited Marines and Sailors undergoing treatment for an infectious or contagious disease from taking leave and required exceptions to be approved by the first GO in the chain of command with concurrence from a medical authority. [Encl (38)]

48. On April 6, 2020, the CG, I MEF issued Operations Order (OPORD) 20-001, I MEF COVID-19 Response, to clarify multiple policies and orders that had been released in response to COVID-19 to remain ready while protecting the force and families. [Encl (40)]

49. OPORD 20-001 directed the establishment of a MIOC with associated 1st MLG and 1st MARDIV support. [Encls (40), (41)]

50. OPORD 20-001 directed four activities to mitigate COVID-19 impacts: (1) prepare to augment MIOC via unit level local isolation; (2) prepare to separate units from high risk populations and areas; (3) prepare to segregate infected units from others to prevent spread, and (4) prepare to restrict personnel to installations. [Encl (40)]

51. On April 20, 2020, the SECDEF reissued travel restriction guidance directing all service members to stop movement, both international and domestically, until June 30, 2020. The stop movement order applied to all official travel and personal leave and non-official travel outside the local area, including permanent change of station and temporary duty. [Encl (39)]

52. Waivers to the SECDEF's April 20, 2020 policy could be granted for travel deemed mission-essential, necessary for humanitarian reasons, or warranted due to extreme hardship, and the approval authority could be delegated no lower than the first flag officer or SES member in the traveler's chain of command. Waivers were to be executed on a case-by-case basis, determined to be in the best interest of the U.S. government, and coordinated between the gaining and losing organizations. [Encl (39)]

53. On May 22, 2020, the SECDEF directed a transition to a conditions-based phased approach to COVID-19 personnel movement and travel restrictions. Service members were directed to stop movement, both domestically and internationally, unless certain conditions were met. These conditions focused on state or regional criteria and installation-level criteria based on conditions in and surrounding DOD installations, facilities, and locations. [Encl (42)]

54. Waivers to the SECDEF's May 22, 2020 policy could be granted for travel deemed mission-essential, necessary for humanitarian reasons, or warranted due to extreme hardship, and the approval authority could be delegated no lower than the first flag or GO or SES member in the traveler's chain of command. Waivers were to be executed on a case-by-case basis, determined to be in the best interest of the U.S. government, and coordinated between the gaining and losing organizations. [Encl (42)]

55. On June 5, 2020, the CMC implemented the SECDEF's May 22, 2020 conditions-based policy. [Encl (43)]

56. On June 25, 2020, the CG, I MEF, released I MEF Order 1050.3, which updated the COVID-19 leave and liberty order and directed that leave outside the local area required approval in writing by the first GO in the chain of command. [Encl (44)]

57. I MEF Order 1050.3 continued to prohibit Marines and Sailors undergoing treatment for an infectious or contagious disease from taking leave. Exceptions required approval by first GO in the chain of command with concurrence from a medical authority. [Encl (44)]

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58. On June 29, 2020, the SECDEF modified the May 22, 2020 guidance by exempting leave travel for service members from the COVID-19 travel restrictions. The SECDEF's modified guidance permitted authorized leave outside the local area if approved at a level no lower than the unit commander or equivalent. [Encl (45)]

59. On June 29, 2020 the CG, I MEF issued FRAGO 10 to OPORD 20-001: I MEF COVID-19 RESPONSE with the subject, "I MEF CONSOLIDATION OF PUBLISHED HIGHER HEADQUARTERS GUIDANCE FOR COVID-19 RESPONSE." [Encl (46)]

60. Fragmentary Order (FRAGO) 10 to OPORD 20-001 attempted to consolidate multiple higher headquarters guidance documents to optimize I MEF response and readiness. The FRAGO required the first GO in the chain of command to approve all exemptions to the stop movement order for (1) mission essential travel; (2) humanitarian reasons, or (3) warranted travel due to extreme hardship. [Encl (46)]

61. On July 1, 2020 the CMC implemented the SECDEF's guidance from June 29, 2020. [Encl (47)]

62. On July 9, 2020 the CG, I MEF, released I MEF Order 1050.4, which updated COVID-19 leave and liberty order and directed that leave travel was exempt from COVID-19-related travel restrictions, but leave taken in conjunction with an official travel itinerary required approval in writing by the first GO in the chain of command. [Encl (48)]

63. I MEF Order 1050.4 continued to prohibit Marines and Sailors undergoing treatment for an infectious or contagious disease from taking leave. Exceptions required approval by first GO in the chain of command with concurrence from a medical authority. [Encl (48)]

64. On July 17, 2020 the CG, I MEF released I MEF Policy Letter 7-20, which delegated authority to the Deputy CG (DCG), I MEF and to the CGs of I MEF MSCs to approve the conduct of ceremonies based on local conditions and the ability to mitigate the risk of spread of COVID-19. The I MEF Policy Letter 7-20 further directed that ceremonies in compliance with the guidance could be approved by lieutenant colonel level commanders and above, with exceptions to policy approved by the first GO in the chain of command. [Encl (49)]

RISK

65. The CG, I MEF and the MSC CGs identified risk in a series of overlapping, connected presentations. Formally these included DRRS reports, MEF Summits, Materiel Readiness Boards/Readiness Working Groups, and informally during normal "battle rhythm" events such as weekly MEF-level staff meetings, bi-weekly MEF CG calls with MSC and MSE commanders, wing-level operations and intelligence briefings, Division Warfighter Summits, and Group-level Logistics Symposia. [Encls (126) - (130)]

66. The CG, I MEF stated he drew on independent sources, like his red team, Center for Naval Analyses representative, inspector general, staff judge advocate, sergeant major, and command master chief to obtain information outside of routine MEF and HQMC-directed staff processes to help assess risks. [Encl (126)]

67. The CG, I MEF encouraged subordinate commanders to communicate laterally and horizontally, and to discuss risks and concerns. [Encls (126) - (130)]

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68. The MSC CGs expressed concern for risk “blind spots.” To help mitigate this concern, the CG, I MEF put his staff on a “wartime battle rhythm” to deal with “rapidly changing and new situations like COVID” and its impacts. The CG, 3d MAW used an “open floor” format for subordinate commanders and staff to discuss specific concerns. The CG, 1st MARDIV sought to address the issue by asking whether the Division was doing too much, working closely with subordinate staffs to ensure they were not overextended, and soliciting feedback from subordinate commanders. The CG, 1st MLG ensured a common understanding of risks undertaken, specifically in units and cumulatively. [Encls (126) - (130)]

69. Specific measures to mitigate risk from October 2019 to July 2020 included reducing or cancelling training events. The CG, I MEF cancelled the MEF exercise (MEFEX) with all the MSC command elements in the spring of 2020 in order to focus on Iran crisis planning. The 1st MLG staff coordinated with I MEF HQ and 15th MEU to withdraw Combat Logistics Battalion (CLB)-15 from participation in WTI course so it could focus on the PTP. The CG, 1st MARDIV requested, and the CG, I MEF approved, a later composite date for the 15th MEU artillery battery in order to deconflict participation in NF20 and AFX 2-20. In addition, the 3d MAW staff coordinated a later CHOP date for the Aviation Combat Element (ACE) in order to ensure that the composite squadron was ready for PTP. [Encls (13) (17), (21), (140), (151)].

70. The MSC CGs interviewed for this investigation all believe that risks were handled well and at the appropriate level. However, the CG, 3d MAW noted that some commanders have difficulty “seeing risk because of lacking experience or misplaced focus,” which compels more senior leaders to provide oversight. [Encls (126) - (130)]

71. The CG, 1st MARDIV believed that his intent [regarding how to handle risks] was clear among subordinate leaders, and relied on them to “identify and implement controls . . . commensurate with their rank and authority.” [Encl (127)]

72. In specific event updates, such as pre-CHOP for CLB-15, the CG, 1st MLG stated that MLG’s staff and commanders discussed not only risks and mitigation but also who owned the risk and whether it was appropriately theirs to assume. [Encl (130)]

73. During the forming, compositing and training of 15th MEU, the DCG, I MEF stated that risks were topics in all major briefs including the MEU’s “MAGTF Design,” E-day updates (the day the MEU is embarked for deployment), and in each of the confirmation briefs for RUT, PMINT, Amphibious Ready Group (ARG)/MEU Exercise (MEUEX), and Composite Training Unit EX (COMPTUEX). [Encl (129)]

74. The DCG, I MEF further indicated that deficiencies in the condition of the AAVs at CHOP and training status of the AA platoon and mechanized company were not raised to his attention or the I MEF CG’s attention. [Encl (129)]

75. On July 11, 2019 an AAV from the 26th MEU sank during training. Based on the investigation of the mishap, the crew properly evacuated the vehicle in accordance with established standards in the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for AA Operations. [Encls (134), (135), (142)]

INSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE RELATED TO AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS

76. The former CO, 26th MEU stated that he strongly believes that both the Navy and Marine Corps have experienced a significant reduction in amphibious experience over the past 20 years, but neither service has adjusted training to address the reduction. [Encl (147)]

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77. The Assistant Chief of Staff (AC/S) G-3, I MEF stated that compared to 25 years ago, the service has less institutional knowledge of MEUs due to their less frequent generation and deployment. [Encl (17)]

78. The AC/S G-3, 1st MARDIV stated that the division had not composited a battalion landing team (BLT) for a west coast MEU since late 2018. [Encl (18)]

79. The CO, 22d MEU stated that knowledge of amphibious operations has decreased over the past two decades due to several factors, including the lack of amphibious ships, less frequent amphibious training, and fewer east and west coast MEUs. [Encl (94)]

80. The former CO, 11th MEU and current CO, 15th MEU stated the institution has gaps in MEU and amphibious knowledge. He cited the less frequent MEU deployments following 9/11 as well as the frequent rotation of MEU staff members as causal factors of this degradation. [Encl (149)]

81. Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , USMC (Retired), who serves with I MEF Expeditionary Operations Training Group (EOTG) and is a recognized subject matter expert (SME) on MEU training and operations, stated that the Marine Corps' focus on amphibious operations has atrophied significantly since 2004 due to numerous land-based deployments following 9/11, including service in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. [Encl (87)]

82. The CG, 1st MARDIV stated he did not believe the division had an institutional knowledge gap regarding forming and training BLTs. He believed the division's sourcing of units for the 31st MEU as well as repetitions the division achieved through participation in exercises like IRON FIST and ISLAND FURY and incorporating more amphibious training into the annual Exercise SK reduced the gap. [Encl (16)]

LEADERSHIP

83. The CG, I MEF was in command from July 30, 2018 to July 31, 2020. [Encl (11)]

84. The DCG, I MEF began serving in this billet in July 2019. [Encl (22)]

85. The CG, I MEF described his use of the DCG as an "extension of me." [Encl (11)]

86. I MEF Order 3120.9A, SOP for MEU, directs the DCG, I MEF to act as CG, I MEF's executive agent for oversight of manning, equipping, forming, training, certifying, and deploying for I MEF MEUs. [Encl (51)]

87. The MEUs report directly to the CG, I MEF. A MEU is a smaller MAGTF consisting of a command element (CE) and three MSEs: a ground combat element (GCE) composed of a BLT; ACE with a composite squadron with fixed wing, tilt-rotor, and rotary wing capability; and a logistics combat element (LCE) with a multi-functional CLB. Together with the Navy's three-ship ARG, the ARG/MEU is a highly mobile, versatile, and self-contained crisis response force. Each MEU is organized, trained, and equipped to operate as a cohesive, single entity that is inherently mobile and operationally flexible. [Encl (75)]

88. To form and composite a MEU, the CGs of each MSC provided a series of briefs to update the CG, I MEF on the progress of organizing, training, and equipping prior the MEU's E date. The first briefs were

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270 and 240 days prior to the E date and the final is E-211, shortly before the MEU composites. [Encl (75)]

89. The MSC CGs provided a status brief on the training and materiel readiness (E-270, E-240) to the CG, I MEF on March 11, 2020. The brief detailed the forces the MSCs would provide to the 15th MEU. The DCG, I MEF did not attend the brief because he was deployed to NF20. [Encls (17), (22), (55), (83)]

90. The MEF staff and Commanders of the MSCs and MSEs provided the 15th MEU composite (E-211) brief to CG, I MEF on April 13, 2020. The DCG, I MEF dialed into the meeting from his quarters while in a COVID precautionary restriction of movement (ROM) status. [Encls (22), (55)]

91. I MEF deployed a MAGTF to participate in Exercise NF20. NF20 was a Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff-directed, CENTCOM-sponsored, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command-executed maritime prepositioned force exercise in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from March 8 to April 5, 2020. [Encl (52)]

92. The DCG, I MEF, in his role as the CG, 1st MEB, commanded the NF20 MAGTF, and the CO, 1st Marine Regiment commanded the GCE. 1st MARDIV provided an AA platoon as part of the GCE. [Encls (52) - (54)]

93. The DCG, I MEF deployed to the UAE from February 26 to April 6, 2020, then was in COVID ROM status upon return from NF20 from April 6 to April 19, 2020. [Encls (5), (22), (53)]

94. The DCG, I MEF stated that he interacted regularly with the CO, 15th MEU before deploying to NF20. On the first day that the DCG came out of ROM, he met with the CO, 15th MEU and conducted a general discussion. [Encl (22)]

95. The CG, I MEF stated that in addition to his DCG, he had the AC/S G-7/EOTG to help him with oversight of MEU training. The AC/S G-7 briefed the CG, I MEF weekly on the training status of the 15th MEU. [Encl (11)]

96. EOTG conducted individual and collective training events for MEUs, assessed the MEU's execution of METs throughout the PTP, and made recommendations to the CG, I MEF for certification of the MEU to deploy. [Encls (56) - (58)]

97. I MEF EOTG did not evaluate the waterborne portion of mechanized operations for the 15th MEU and is not required to do so. I MEF EOTG evaluated, assessed, and trained from the shoreline inland. I MEF EOTG has an AA staff noncommissioned officer billet on its table of organization, but the billet was not staffed in the authorized strength report. [Encls (57) - (59)]

98. DCG, I MEF stated that he told the CO, 15th MEU and the AC/S G-7, I MEF to adjust the pace of training during PMINT if necessary to ensure the safe conduct of the event. [Encl (22)]

99. The AC/S G-3, I MEF stated that he, the CG, I MEF, the AC/S G-7, and the CO, 15th MEU understood collectively that "we are not in a normal place" related to the onset of COVID and the MEU's training. He also stated that "anybody could call a time out or drive reconsideration of whether we were to do something" if conditions required. [Encl (17)]

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1st Marine Division

100. HQMC has not assigned a GO to serve as the 1st MARDIV Assistant Division Commander (ADC) since 2015. 1st MARDIV has had two GO ADCs in the past 10 years. [Encls (11), (16), (18), (60), (61)]

101. The 2d MARDIV had five GO ADCs, and 2d MAW has had two GO Assistant Wing Commanders (AWC) in the past ten years. The 3d MARDIV had no GO ADCs, and 1st MAW has had two GO AWCs in the past ten years. Finally, 3d MAW had five GO AWCs in the past ten years. [Encls (60), (61)]

102. If staffed with a GO, the 1st MARDIV ADC could serve as an intermediate level of supervision and oversight of the lieutenant colonel commanders as well as other GO duties delegated from the CG, 1st MARDIV. [Encls (4), (16), (18), (22)]

103. HQMC intentionally does not assign colonels to ADC billets because doing so would create a shortage elsewhere in the Marine Corps. [Encls (60), (61)]

104. 1st MARDIV has six independent battalions commanded by lieutenant colonels that report directly to CG, 1st MARDIV, not a regimental or another colonel level commander. The six commands are 3d AA Bn; 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance (LAR) Bn; 3d LAR Bn; 1st Reconnaissance Bn; 1st Combat Engineer Bn, and 1st Tank Bn. [Encl (4)]

105. The CG, 1st MARDIV stated that the unfortunate side effect of gapping the ADC billet compelled his chief of staff (COS) and AC/S G-3 to frequently oversee independent battalions when the CG was unavailable to do so. He stated that the leadership strength of his COS and AC/S G-3 mitigated the gapped ADC billet. [Encl (16)]

106. CG, I MEF was concerned that no ADC was assigned to 1st MARDIV and pressed HQMC for a colonel overstaff to fill the gapped ADC billet. The CG, I MEF eventually assigned a colonel to the ADC position in October 2020. [Encl (11)]

107. The CG, 3d MAW appointed his COS who had previously commanded a MEU and later a group commander to supervise and mentor the 15th MEU ACE CO. [Encls (11), (13)]

1st Marine Regiment, 1st MARDIV

108. 1st Marine Regiment was commanded by a colonel; he exercised command and control over four assigned battalions, one of which was 1/4. [Encl (4)]

109. The CO, 1st Marine Regiment deployed to NF20 from March 9 through April 7, 2020 to command the NF20 MAGTF GCE. He conducted ROM until April 21, 2020. [Encls (11), (62), (63)]

110. The CO delegated authority to sign "Acting" in his absence to 1st Marine Regiment Executive Officer (XO). [Encl (64)]

111. The CO, 1st Marine Regiment was (b) (6) and (b) (6)
. [Encls (16), (62)]

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112. The CO, 1st Marine Regiment stated that he was not present for any readiness briefs prior to the 15th MEU composite due to his deployment in support of NF20. The CO, 1st Marine Regiment observed 1/4 conducting training prior to composite and was impressed with CO, 1/4. [Encl (62)]

113. The CO, 1st Marine Regiment stated that his focus for 1/4 was on personnel readiness and that he had no involvement or awareness with regard to 1/4's attachments (e.g., an AA platoon) in support of forming the BLT. [Encl (62)]

114. The XO, 1st Marine Regiment stated that that his primary focus was on the shortage of infantry lieutenants and captains. Prior to the composite of 15th MEU, 1/4 was short six rifle platoon commanders. The platoon commander for 2d platoon, Company B (on board the mishap vehicle), joined 1/4 on April 6, 2020, two weeks before composite and approximately three months before the mishap. [Encls (19), (55), (63)]

3d AA Bn

115. The design of NF20 featured the offload, throughput, and employment of vehicles including AAVs from maritime prepositioned shipping, and the CG, I MEF tasked 1st MARDIV to provide an AA platoon and enablers. [Encl (54)]

116. The CO, 3d AA Bn designated the AA platoon slated to support the 15th MEU to deploy to NF20. He stated he designated the platoon for two reasons: first, the platoon would be conducting the same type of training requirements throughout the exercise as they would in CONUS for PTP, and second, the platoon would be conducting the required training with its future headquarters. [Encl (65)]

117. The concept for NF20 included mechanized operations, although not amphibious mechanized operations specifically. 1st Marine Regiment did not schedule 1/4 to participate in NF20. [Encls (18), (52)]

118. Approximately one half of the AA platoon deployed to NF20, while half did not due to COVID-related flight cancellations. The partial platoon was deployed for NF20 from early March until March 29, 2020 and then in ROM until April 12, 2020 upon return to Camp Pendleton. [Encls (50), (66), (68), (71), (137)]

119. The AA platoon composited with the 15th MEU on 20 April, eight days after part of the platoon completed ROM. [Encls (66) - (68), (137)]

120. The 3d AA Bn experienced personnel turnover in key billets from November 2019 to July 2020, especially before and after April 2020. Three of the four majors assigned to 3d AA Bn were deployed to individual augment billets. During this timeframe, 3d AA Bn experienced turnover in these billets, with five different officers serving as Bn logistics officer, two as the operations officer, and three as the Headquarters and Service (H&S) Company commander. [Encls (50), (68) - (71)]

121. The CO, 3d AA Bn developed and executed a plan to reorganize the battalion during 2019 and 2020 in order to be better postured to provide the requisite AA support to 1st MARDIV. The reorganization allocated personnel and equipment to H&S Company vice a line company such as Company A. Unlike the line companies, H&S Company did not have an assigned company maintenance officer and master sergeant maintenance chief. Accordingly, H&S Company relied on maintenance support from the battalion maintenance officer and battalion maintenance chief. [Encls (70) - (74)]

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122. The 3d AA Bn battalion maintenance officer stated he did not think he needed to provide maintenance oversight to H&S Company since he was the battalion maintenance officer, not the company maintenance officer. [Encls (72), (74)]

123. The CO, 3d AA Bn assigned Marines and equipment from H&S Company to the 15th MEU AA platoon. [Encls (70) - (74), (121) - (124)]

124. 3d AA Bn had no policy or order to establish a baseline for how to generate an AA platoon for the 15th MEU. [Encl (89)]

15TH MEU

125. The BLT is built around an infantry battalion, typically augmented with an LAR company, artillery battery, reconnaissance platoon, combat engineer platoon, and AA platoon. The ACE is built around an MV-22 squadron, with attachments from other assault support and offensive air support squadrons and associated aviation ground support equipment. The CLB is a multifunctional logistics support unit designed to specifically support the BLT and generally the entire MEU. [Encls (67), (75)]

126. The CG, I MEF directed the CG, 1st MARDIV to provide 1/4 as the infantry battalion and a detachment of 14 AAVs from 3d AA Bn to the 15th MEU. The CO, 1/4 designated Company B as the BLT's mechanized raid force, which was the infantry element charged to integrate with the AA platoon. [Encl (67)]

127. The CO, 15th MEU assumed command and control of the BLT on April 20, 2020, the day the MEU composited. At that point the CO, 15th MEU took responsibility for executing the prescribed I MEF PTP with the attached MSEs. [Encl (67)]

128. The CO, 15th MEU and the MSC CGs reported directly to the CG, I MEF. [Encls (4), (67)]

129. Prior to composite, 1/4 was part of 1st Marine Regiment and the AA platoon was part of 3d AA Bn prior to April 20, 2020. The CO, 1st Marine Regiment and CO, 3d AA Bn both reported to the CG, 1st MARDIV. [Encl (4), (67)]

130. The CG, I MEF required the MSC CGs to provide condition code A equipment (serviceable) with all stock list-level 3 (SL-3) components (e.g., tools, attachments) and personnel that were sufficiently trained prior to the 15th MEU composite date. [Encl (67)]

131. The CO, 15th MEU felt comfortable raising issues to the I MEF CG, DCG, COS, and the entire MEF staff. [Encl (19)]

132. The CG, I MEF directed the MEF staff and CO, 15th MEU to further concepts for MEU employment consistent with "MEU 2030" in the CMC's Force Design. The concepts included employment of all domain reconnaissance, high mobility artillery rocket system (HIMARS), information operations, cyber operations, small boat capability with the combat rubber raiding craft (CRRC), and F-35Bs. Some of these concepts were unique to the 15th MEU; others were improvements on established capabilities. [Encls (16), (17), (18), (76) - (78)]

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133. The additional equipment and personnel for these capabilities created increased training, resourcing, and maintenance requirements. [Encls (17), (58), (79)]

134. The HIMARS and CRRC capabilities were not typically embarked with west coast MEUs. [Encls (76), (80)]

135. The ARG was composed of two landing platform dock (LPD) class ships and a landing helicopter dock class ship (LHD). Typically, ARGs are configured with one LHD, one LPD, and one landing ship dock. The atypical composition of the MAKIN ISLAND ARG required the 15th MEU staff to conduct additional planning and coordination in order to confirm the organization for embarkation and assignment to shipping would support the MEU's concept of employment. [Encls (17), (67)]

136. The February 2020 1st MARDIV Warfighting Summit included a discussion of challenges. One challenge noted was the fact that current availability of U.S. Navy ships do not meet training requirements for amphibious operations across all 1st MARDIV and 1st MLG units. [Encl (14)]

137. The CG, I MEF tasked the 15th MEU CE to participate in Exercise IRON FIST from January 14 - February 16, 2020. IRON FIST is an annual, bilateral amphibious training exercise conducted with the Japanese Ground Self Defense Forces at Camp Pendleton, San Clemente Island, and associated offshore training areas. [Encl (6), (159)]

138. 1/4 did not participate in IRON FIST because the battalion was traveling to MCAGCC to conduct its Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation (MCCRE). The 15th MEU AA platoon did not participate because CO, 3d AA Bn designated the platoon to participate in NF20. [Encls (6), (81), (143)]

139. ATX 2-20 was a SLTE at the MCAGCC at which 1/4 conducted its MCCRE. The CO, 3d AA Bn provided Company C to participate in ATX 2-20. The 15th MEU AA Platoon did not participate in ATX 2-20 because the platoon was designated to participate in NF20. [Encls (6), (81), (143)]

140. I MEF deployed over 1,000 Marines to NF20, led by the DCG, I MEF, to participate in NF20 in UAE between February 26 and April 6, 2020. [Encls (52), (81)]

141. CG, I MEF tasked CG, 1st MARDIV to provide a platoon-sized security force to the USNS MERCY while it was docked at the port of Los Angeles to provide non-COVID related medical services from March 20 to April 20, 2020. [Encl (37)]

142. The CG, 1st MARDIV tasked 1/4 to provide the platoon since 1/4 was already designated as the Alert Battalion Task Force to deploy to any crisis on short notice if required. The CO, 1/4 tasked Company B to provide a platoon to serve as a security force during the period while the remainder of the battalion continued to conduct training. [Encls (62), (82)]

143. The CO, 15th MEU stated that the major challenges to his command on and before July 30, 2020 were a combination of materiel readiness, compressed training timelines, and adjustments to the pre-deployment training program schedule. He believed he had had a tight relationship with the I MEF staff. [Encl (19)]

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TRAINING READINESS

144. The Marine Corps and I MEF orders required that MSCs provide properly trained units to the 15th MEU. [Encls (56), (67), (98)]

145. The MEF LOI for 15th MEU Deployment 21-1 directed all MEF MSCs to conduct the requisite annual and military occupational specialty (MOS)-specific training and complete pre-deployment inspections and remedial actions prior to E-204 (composite date on April 20, 2020) for the GCE, ACE and LCE. [Encl (67)]

146. The Marine Corps and I MEF required MEUs to composite no later than 180 days prior to deployment. All MSEs and attachments were required to have completed all non-MEU specific core MET training prior to composite. [Encls (56), (67)]

147. There is no Marine Corps or I MEF order that requires MSEs (e.g., GCE, ACE, or LCE) to form or train together prior to the composite date for a MEU. [Encls (56), (67)]

148. The number of tasks levied on I MEF and 1st MARDIV commanders and staffs during the period from January 2020 through July 2020 increased due to the number of COVID-related changes. The MSEs were able to conduct training events, but the staffs iteratively re-planned and re-coordinated as venues and dates changed based on restrictions, availability, and force preservation considerations. [Encls (11), (17), (57), (76)]

149. The 1st MARDIV read-ahead slides for the 15th MEU brief to the CG, I MEF on April 13, 2020 included the comment regarding the AA Platoon: "Status of AAV Core METS: Trained but not evaluated - NF20 driven PTP." [Encl (84)]

150. The CG, 3d MAW stated that deck qualifications for pilots were a challenge because of lack of available naval shipping due to longer periods spent in maintenance. Accordingly, the CG, 3d MAW directed his units to be ready on short notice to take advantage of any "pop up" amphibious ship availability. [Encl (13)]

151. Following the composite date, the 15th MEU began its formal PTP consisting of three stages: initial, intermediate, and final. The initial training stage consisted of specialized training courses and core MEU MET training that progressively built from individual to collective events. [Encls (56), (67)]

152. MEU training is framed within a 26-week period, and the MEU PTP provides for the efficient use of time, resources, and assets, with limited flexibility to adjust for additional external requirements. [Encl (56)]

153. The MEU PTP is a focused training program that incrementally builds the core MET capabilities of the MEU CE, GCE, ACE, and LCE. [Encl (56)]

154. The intermediate training stage consists of MEU-level collective training events that build and integrate unit capabilities in addition to shipboard interoperability with the ARG during at-sea periods. Key events in this intermediate stage include RUT, PMINT, and ARG/MEUEX. PMINT was the first at-sea period and was planned and executed by the ARG/MEU team. [Encl (56)]

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155. RUT was initially slated for June 4-15, 2020 at MCAGCC; however, the training venue was modified to mitigate the potential impacts of COVID on civilian population centers. [Encls (17), (57), (67)]

156. On June 12, 2020, Commander, Pacific Fleet shifted PMINT to a month later than originally planned, and ARG/MEUX was combined with COMPTUEX in an effort to mitigate the impacts of COVID. [Encl (85)]

157. The CO, 15th MEU stated that some of the MEU's training was postponed, and the MEU did not experience the same level of naval integration other MEUs normally experience. Based on COVID and ship availability, the 15th MEU changed the venue for RUT, shifted the PMINT by approximately a month, and combined the last two at-sea periods. [Encl (19)]

158. While EOTG can provide subject matter expertise assistance for PMINT if requested, EOTG has no directed role in developing the schedule of events. [Encls (57), (58), (86)]

159. The CO, 15th MEU conducted a 9-day pre-PMINT event that included Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure, Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel, and small boat raid training. This pre-PMINT training did not include mechanized waterborne training. [Encls (57), (76)]

160. During RUT, the 15th MEU AA platoon conducted waterborne training without embarked personnel, including section and platoon level day and night waterborne operations. [Encls (57), (76)]

161. The AAV mishap occurred on July 30, 2020, during PMINT. MEUs are certified for deployment after the final at-sea period which occurs in the final training stage. [Encl (1), (56)]

162. ARG/MEUX is the second at-sea period and occurs during the intermediate stage. All ARG/MEUX event locations, training scenarios, and safety considerations are planned by EOTG in coordination with the MEU. [Encls (57), (58), (87), (88)]

163. The final training stage is focused on the certification of the MEU and remediation of any training or other readiness deficiencies. [Encl (56)]

164. Colonel ^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)} noted that due to the sustained high operational tempo, he has observed a de-synchronization over time between the staffing of units with Marines, unit training timelines, and deployments. This dynamic is especially evident at the company grade and below (i.e., captains, lieutenants, staff non-commissioned officers, non-commissioned officers, and junior Marines) where small unit leaders join the predeployment training late, contributing to increased levels of risk. [Encl (87)]

Underwater Egress Training

165. MCO 3502.3C directs "[For] personnel whose normal mission profile entails flying over or operating in close proximity to water: Category A training will be met by utilizing the one day Modular Amphibious Egress Trainer (MAET) for vertical lift air platforms or one day Submerged Vehicle Egress Training (SVET) for wheeled or tracked vehicles. MAET or SVET training, if successfully completed, is good for two years. If a passenger requires remediation training, Shallow Water Egress Trainer (SWET) will meet the training requirement." [Encl (56)]

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166. MARADMIN 293/18 predates MCO 3502.3C but also establishes interim service level UET requirements. The MARADMIN conflicts with MCO 3502.3C by allowing untrained passengers to receive a brief from the vehicle commander, vice completing the formal UET. MARADMIN 293/18 states, "Personnel unable to complete UET prior to participating in rotary wing/tilt-rotor aircraft flight operations over water shall be briefed on the use of the supplemental emergency breathing device and procedures for underwater egress. . . . Personnel that are unable to complete UET prior to conducting AAV waterborne operations shall be briefed on the procedures for underwater egress. AAV commanders are responsible for ensuring all untrained personnel are fully briefed prior to splash." [Encls (56), (90), (95), (96)]

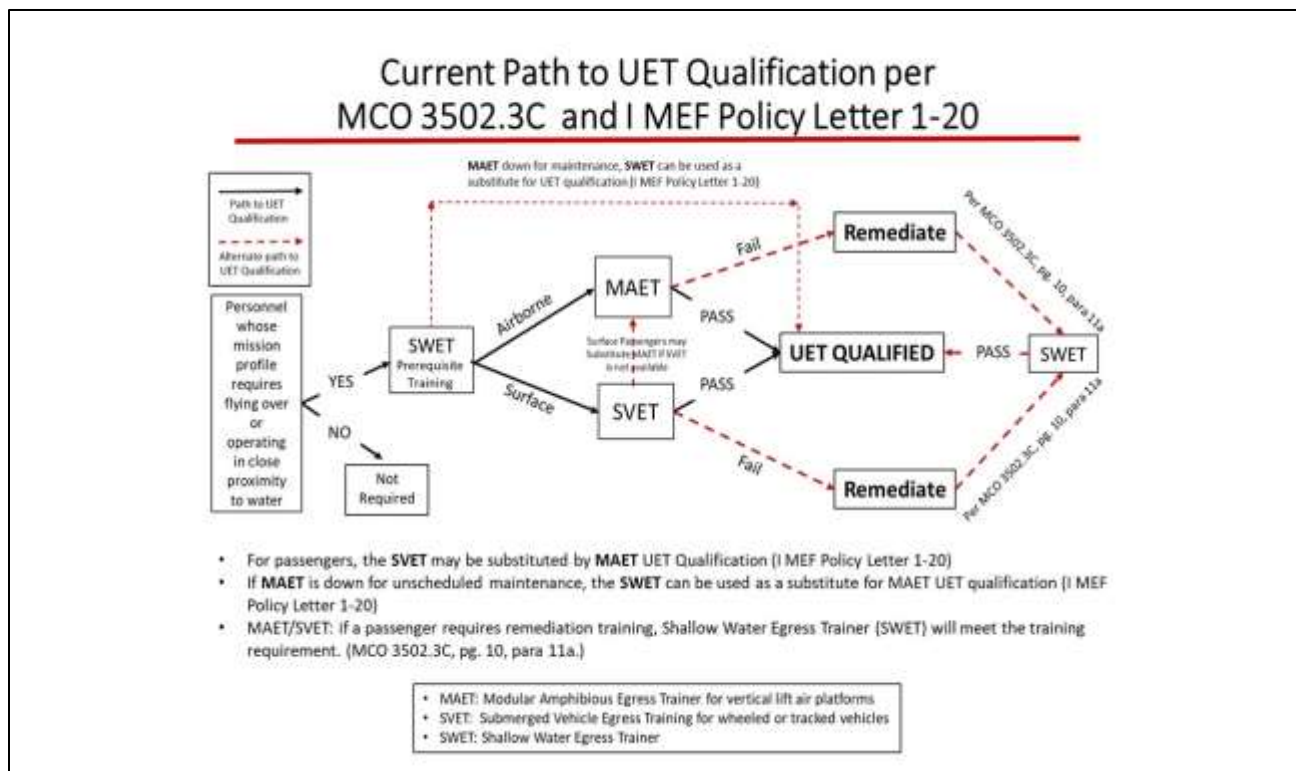
167. Navy Marine Corps Publication (NAVMC) 3500.2C requires AA crewmembers and AA mechanics to be UET qualified via the SVET. [Encl (91)]

168. The CG, I MEF promulgated a UET policy, "Successful completion of the MAET is required for over-water flight qualification. For passengers, the SVET may be substituted by MAET for UET qualification." [Encl (92)]

169. The I MEF Policy Letter 1-20 states that in the event that the MAET is down for unscheduled maintenance, the SWET can be used as substitute for MAET UET qualification. If a passenger requires remediation training, the SWET will meet the training requirement. [Encl (56), (92)]

170. The DCG, I MEF stated that the I MEF order on UET requirements was vague. [Encl (22)]

171. The graphic below displays the MCO 3502.3C and I MEF Policy 1-20 requirements. The graphic depicts the primary path to UET qualification, as well as alternative paths. [Encls (56), (92)]



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172. Senior leader statements reflect an awareness of UET throughput concerns related to both pool maintenance and COVID impacts. [Encls (16), (18), (93)]

173. The CG, I MEF did not recall any BLT 1/4 UET or swim qualification issues brought to his attention during the forming and composting of the 15th MEU. [Encl (11)]

174. The CG, 1st MARDIV stated that he did not recall either the CO, 1/4 or the CO, 3d AA Bn alerting him that the incomplete swim qualifications and UET qualifications were a concern or raised by either the MEU or MEF as a concern. [Encl (16)]

175. The AC/S G-3, 1st MARDIV stated that the limiting factor at the UET facility is throughput capacity. [Encl (18)]

176. The XO, 15th MEU stated that he does not recall concerns about readiness or UET in the deployment briefs. [Encl (80)]

177. The CG, 1st MARDIV briefed the AA Platoon as 70% and 1/4 as 49% UET complete at the E-211 brief. [Encl (84)]

178. The I MEF 2020 UET Utilization Report shows that the UET facility was closed for the majority of April 2020 for pool heater and maintenance issues. [Encl (97), (139)]

179. I MEF Policy 1-20 lists waiver authority for UET at the lieutenant colonel and colonel level depending on circumstances. In the event a passenger of an aircraft or AAV is unable to attend appropriate training, the first lieutenant colonel level commander in the chain of command may issue a one-time waiver. In the event a passenger attended but failed to complete UET, the waiver authority shall be the first colonel level commander in the chain of command. [Encl (92)]

180. The MEU XO stated that he handled all of the MEU's UET waivers in discussion with the MEU CO, and they did not delegate it to the lieutenant colonel MSE level. He said he was not aware of any waivers requested for members of the mechanized company in 1/4. [Encl (80)]

181. I MEF 2020 UET Utilization Report reflects that 1/4 conducted MAET qualification for 154 Marines in December 2019, SWET qualification for 772 Marines in April 2020, SWET qualification for 185 Marines in May 2020, and SWET qualification for 119 Marines in June 2020. [Encls (97)]

Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluations

182. MCO 3501.1E requires all infantry and logistics regiments, Marine air groups, and battalions, squadrons, aviation detachments, deployable companies, and other independently deployable organizations will conduct a MCCRE of a unit's core and assigned METs at least once every two years, or once per deployment cycle. [Encl (98)]

183. The CG, I MEF directed the CGs of 1st MARDIV, 3d MAW, and 1st MLG to conduct a MCCRE of the units they provided to the 15th MEU prior to April 20, 2020. [Encl (51)]

184. The I MEF LOI for the 15th MEU deployment directs, "GCE and ACE attachments are not required to conduct a standalone MCCRE. It is strongly encouraged that GCE and ACE attachments

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conduct their assessments with their associated battalion or squadron or in concert with a parent unit MCCRE, ITX, or other assessment event.” [Encl (67)]

185. The CG, 1st MARDIV required MCCREs. The 1st MARDIV Campaign Plan directs every deploying unit, to the lowest level, to conduct a MCCRE. [Encls (7), (100)]

186. The CG, 1st MARDIV stated that in the case of independent battalions such as 3d AA Bn, the battalion commanders would be responsible for evaluating their subordinate units. [Encl (16)]

187. The E-211 brief to the CG, I MEF indicated that all Division elements were complete on MCCRE training, with the exception of the 3d AA platoon and artillery battery. The artillery battery conducted its MCCRE on May 5-7, 2020, which was before the battery officially attached to the 15th MEU pursuant to the LOI. [Encls (67), (84)]

188. The Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron (VMU)-1 and Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA)-122 attachments from 3d MAW did not complete a MCCRE. [Encl (99)]

189. The AC/S G-3, 1st MARDIV stated that the 15th MEU AA detachment was not evaluated as part of a MCCRE because they were deployed to NF20. [Encl (18)]

190. The AC/S G-3, I MEF stated that NF20 did not offer the training and readiness events or core MET training opportunities that would align with a MEU PTP. [Encl (17)]

191. The 3d AA Bn conducted MCCREs for companies deploying in support of the I MEF UDP, but did not conduct MCCREs for platoons deploying as part of a MEU. [Encls (95), (96), (138)]

192. The reports in MCTIMS do not have any data that AA platoons in the Marine Corps conducted MCCREs. [Encl (109), (138), (150)]

MATERIEL READINESS

193. The CG, I MEF required the MSC CGs to provide serviceable and operationally ready equipment at composite, unless otherwise specified or requested. [Encls (51), (157)]

194. The CG, I MEF tasked the MSC CGs to provide equipment to the CO, 15 MEU that was in condition code A and SL-3 complete and personnel that were appropriately trained. Condition code A equipment is serviceable equipment ready to be used, and SL-3 items (e.g., spare tire, repair tools) are additional accessories required to operate equipment. [Encls (67), (157)]

195. Prior to transferring equipment from one unit to another, the Joint Limited Technical Inspection (JLTI) is the process for units to systematically inspect and evaluate the condition of vehicles and equipment. The JLTI also accounts for the SL-3. Following the JLTI, trained maintenance Marines enter the noted discrepancies as service requests into Global Combat Support System-Marine Corps (GCSS-MC) in order to plan for associated parts and labor. [Encl (155), (157)]

196. The CG, 1st MARDIV and CO, 3d AA Bn did not conduct or direct pre-inspections of equipment prior to the transfer equipment to the 15th MEU. [Encl (74)]

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197. 1st MARDIV Order 4790.2 states that inspections are one of the principle means available to the MSE commander to ascertain whether planning and organization are sound, their staffs are functioning effectively, and directives are clear and well understood. [Encl (155)]

198. Five 3d AA Bn Marines, supervised by a staff noncommissioned officer in charge, conducted JLTIs of the 13 AAVs (eventually 14) assigned to the 15th MEU from April 13-15, 2020. The JLTIs identified five non-operational vehicles and seven vehicles that were missing excessive SL-3. [Encl (136), (158)]

199. The 15th MEU AAV platoon commander stated that the first time he saw the MEU AAVs was during the JLTIs. [Encl (137)]

200. On April 30, 2020, following the JLTIs, all 13 AAVs assigned to the 15th MEU AA platoon were reported as operational. Eleven of the 13 were reported in an operational but degraded status in GCCS-MC. [Encl (102), (103)]

201. FoF 348 in reference (b) states that based upon witness statements 12 of 13 of the AAVs slated for the 15th MEU were non-operational on April 20, 2020. The maintenance records in GCCS-MC and the JLTIs are consistent and indicate only 5 of 13 vehicles were non-operational. This finding differs from the original command investigation (CI). [Encls (102), (103)]

202. FoF 342 in reference (b) states the vehicles identified to go to the 15th MEU AA platoon were taken from the Administrative Deadline Lot (ADL) and had not been operating for nearly a year, with the exception of quarterly startups. This FoF was based upon witness statements; however, GCCS-MC does not have data or entries that support this FoF. This finding differs from the original CI. [Encls (132), (141)]

203. From April 20 to July 20, 2020, eleven of 14 AAVs belonging to the 15th MEU's AA platoon were not operational at various points during this timeframe. [Encl (102)]

204. MCO 4790.2 defines the ADL Program as a method of deferring maintenance, enabling unit commanders to preserve resources when operational conditions allow. Vehicles identified for ADL should be inspected, inducted, and documented utilizing GCCS-MC. Identified equipment kept in ADL must be mission capable and a minimum of Condition Code B. The CO, 3d AA Bn operated an ADL program in accordance with MCO 4790.2. [Encls (101), (132), (145)]

Readiness Reporting

205. Marine units use DRRS-MC to report their materiel and training readiness as well as quantitative data and readiness ratings. Unit commanders also include remarks qualitatively describing their top readiness concerns in the monthly reports. [Encl (104)]

206. The AC/S G-3 and AC/S G-4, I MEF briefed the CG, I MEF monthly on DRRS-MC and quarterly on materiel readiness. [Encl (105)]

207. The CG, 1st MARDIV participated in a weekly MSC and MSE Commander SVTC with the CG, I MEF which included the MEU commanders. [Encls (16), (71)]

208. The AC/S G-3 and AC/S G-4, 1st MARDIV briefed the CG, 1st MARDIV monthly on materiel readiness in DRRS-MC. [Encl (18)]

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209. The 3d AA Bn DRRS-MC reports from the four months prior to April 20, 2020 did not identify any significant materiel readiness risks. [Encl (106)]

210. The CO, 3d AA Bn reported an overall average vehicle readiness rate of 84% in his January to April 2020 SITREP to the CG, 1st MARDIV. The Marine Corps average readiness rate for the same period was 71%. [Encls (108), (146)]

Dates	Vehicle Readiness	Overall Bn Readiness	Excerpts from 3d AA Bn SITREPS
Jan 10 - 23, 2020	AAVP7: 73.65% AAVC7: 75% AAVR7: 100%	79.77%	"H&S Company is currently preparing the 15th MEU Platoon and a detachment of Marines to support OPP for Native Fury PTP requirements."
Jan 24 - Feb 6, 2020	AAVP7: 84.25% AAVC7: 75% AAVR7: 100%	84.39%	"H&S Company is currently preparing the 15th MEU Platoon for Native Fury 20."
Feb 7 - 20, 2020	AAVP7: 88.39% AAVC7: 83.33% AAVR7: 100%	84.44%	"H&S Company is preparing the 15th MEU Plt and a detachment supporting the OPP for Native Fury 20. Executing the PTP requirements."
Feb 21 - Mar 5, 2020	AAVP7: 89.88% AAVC7: 91.67% AAVR7: 100%	90.32%	"H&S Company is conducting CBRN RS&D training and preparing to deploy the 15th MEU Plt for Native Fury." ". . . H&S Company have had the lead and oversight of the Battalion Maintenance Stand-Down. The results of the process and procedure focused stand-down is clearly visible in the increase in the overall Battalion Readiness." "20 Apr - 15MEU Plt CHOP (post Native Fury20 re-deployment)"
Mar 6 - 19, 2020	AAVP7: 92.26% AAVC7: 100% AAVR7: 83.33%	92.47%	"H&S Company is providing, and supporting, the AAV Detachment embarked on the USS Comstock for TF Ellis and also supporting Native Fury 20 with an MPF Offload OPP."
Mar 20 - Apr 2, 2020	AAVP7: 79.39% AAVC7: 100% AAVR7: 80.00%	80.77%	". . . H&S Company have received all elements of their 15th MEU Platoon retrograding from Native Fury 20. They will be receiving their OPP detachment next week. The 15th MEU AAV Platoon is currently conducting JLTIs with BLT 1/4 in preparation for their attachment and subsequent work-up and deployment."
Apr 3 - 16, 2020	AAVP7: 83.64%	83.52%	"The company has also been conducting equipment JLTIs and preparations to attach the 15th MEU AAV Platoon to Co B, BLT 1/4."

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	AAVC7: 83.33% AAVR7: 80.00%		". . . H&S Company have been conducting vehicle maintenance actions with their Motor-T Platoon and GS Platoon, while the 15th MEU Platoon is finalizing "pre-chop" actions and Native Fury-20 post Deployment ROM."
Apr 17 - May 21, 2020	AAVP7: 85% AAVC7: 85% AAVR7: 100%	85.64%	"H&S Company ... has attached the 15th MEU AAV Platoon to Co B, BLT 1/4." "The Company "roll-out" conducted last week reinforced readiness requirements and validated the Company's above average readiness numbers"
May 22 - June 18, 2020	AAVP7: 100% AAVC7: 75% AAVR7: 100%	89%	"H&S Company is providing an AAV Detachment to TF Ellis and to the 15th MEU, BLT 1/4, Co B."

211. The CO, 3d AA Bn provided additional comments through readiness reporting venues that discussed concerns related to a range of matters such as the overall operational tempo, supply needs, COVID, personnel shortfalls, and lack of individual professional military education (PME). He did not, however, report specific issues regarding his ability to support tasks including the 15th MEU AA platoon. [Encl (106)]

212. The CO, 3d AA Bn provided detailed reports and plans for resolving issues to CG, 1st MARDIV in the SITREPs. He did not identify issues with supporting tasks or state an inability to meet upcoming requirements such as the MEU or UDP. [Encls (16), (71), (108)]

213. The AC/S G-4, 1st MARDIV stated that from January to July 2020, the AAV portion of the division materiel readiness briefs was good overall, with no significant issues or red flags that would have alerted 1st MARDIV leadership to a materiel readiness problem at 3d AA Bn. [Encl (107)]

Inspections

214. The Marine Corps' Field Supply and Maintenance Analysis Office (FSMAO) conducts regular analyses of logistics functional areas throughout the Marine Corps in order to assess compliance with orders and directives. [Encl (110)]

215. FSMAO-West conducted a formal analysis of 3d AA Bn in 2017 and 2019. The results showed a net degradation, vice improvement, over the two-year period. [Encls (111), (112)]

216. The 2019 FSMAO assessed 3d AA Bn as non-compliant and specific findings included insufficient oversight by maintenance management officer, responsible officers, and commodity managers; ineffective internal inspections, and failure to follow up on identified discrepancies. [Encl (112)]

217. 3d AA Bn was the only non-compliant unit in 1st MARDIV and one of seven non-compliant of the 36 units total in I MEF. [Encl (131)]

218. The Division's Logistics Readiness Evaluation (LRE) is a method to assess compliance with established materiel readiness policy and procedures. [Encl (113)]

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219. 1st MARDIV conducted an LRE on 3d AA Bn in 2018 and 2020. The 2020 LRE findings included ordnance training (not conducting required shop safety classes), maintenance training (not conducting required clerk or supervisor training), and quality control (assigned personnel not documenting final inspections). 3d AA Bn's performance in LREs declined from 2018 to 2020. [Encls (114)-(117)]

220. The CO, 3d AA Bn briefed the CG, 1st MARDIV on the FSMAO results in September 2019. The brief included an AC/S G4, 1st MARDIV summary and 3d AA Bn corrective action plans. [Encls (112), (118), (152), (153)]

221. The CO, 3d AA Bn briefed the CG, 1st MARDIV on the LRE results in June 2020. These briefs included an AC/S G-4, 1st MARDIV Summary and 3d AA Bn corrective action plan. [Encls (117), (118), (148), (154)]

222. The CG, 1st MARDIV's Inspection Program (CGIP) focused on the internal management, operation, and administration processes and is distinct from the logistics focus of the LRE and FSMAO evaluations. [Encl (119)]

223. 1st MARDIV conducted a CGIP inspection of 3d AA Bn in 2018 and 2020. The CGIP results assessed the battalion as mission capable based on an evaluation of 33 core functional areas and 17 supplemental areas. [Encl (120), (133)]

Other 3d AA Bn Activities and Events

224. The CO, 3d AA Bn planned, coordinated, and executed a battalion reorganization plan from November 2019 to April 2020 in an effort to better service his GFM requirements, and in the process, enhance readiness as a whole. The CO, 3d AA Bn, as part of the reorganization, designated H&S Company as the headquarters for the 15th MEU AA platoon. [Encls (16), (70) - (74), (121)-(124)]

225. The CG, 1 MARDIV did not recall any concerns raised by the CO, 3d AA Bn that the AA platoon would not be ready to attached to the 15th MEU or fail to meet its MEU PTP requirements with BLT 1/4. [Encls (16), (127)]

226. The Marine Corps AAV Return to Condition Code Alpha (RCCA) Program designated AAVs for depot-level overhaul which includes hull inspection, refurbishment, and replacement of designated parts. In July 2020, 265 AAVs service-wide were approved for RCCA. Of the battalion's 199 vehicles on hand on April 15, 2020, the CO, 3d AA Bn had designated 53 for the RCCA Program. [Encl (144)]

227. The Marine Corps AAV modification plan designated three significant upgrades for the AAV over a 5-year period. The three upgrades include an intercom system replacement, remote weapons station, and tactical radio modernization. [Encls (125), (144)]

228. HQMC provided guidance to the Fleet Marine Forces on the preference to maximize use of RCCA vehicles in support of the AAV modification plan. The Marine Corps plans to divest the AAVs that have been modified last in order to field the ACV. [Encls (71), (72), (74), (144)]

229. The CO, 3d AA Bn made the decision to not send RCCA AAVs on deployments in order to make them available for the modifications. [Encls (71), (72), (74)]

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OPINIONS

1. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once noted, “The character of every act depends upon the circumstances in which it is done.” With hindsight and analysis, I assess that upon composite on April 20, 2020, the 15th MEU did not receive forces that were optimally trained and equipped to the required standards. Rather than any single or isolated decision, act, or process, however, a confluence of factors contributed to the tragic AAV incident that occurred on July 30, 2020. These included an aggregation of both normal and unprecedented circumstances leading up to the composite of the 15th MEU. [FoFs (1) - (5), (11) - (12), (25) - (99), (105) - (106), (109) - (124), (132) - (136), (140) - (143), (148), (150), (155) - (157), (178), (187), (196) - (204), (215) - (217), (219) - (223)]
2. Within I MEF and its MSCs, I found consistent indications during early 2020 of a highly professional, cohesive, well-functioning organization. I believe the CG, I MEF provided appropriate and reasonable oversight of I MEF’s 53,000 Marines and Sailors. The overall command climate was healthy and positive, especially the relationship between the I MEF commander and his staff, the MSCs, and MSEs. The I MEF Headquarters had clearly understood priorities, frequent coordination between the commanders and staffs, and rigorous processes. I MEF was also forward looking, implementing the CMC’s Force Design 2030 efforts, which included divesture of major capabilities like 1st Tank Bn and exploring emerging concepts like Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations and new configurations aboard the 15th MEU. Importantly, a review of applicable readiness reports from early 2020 show that I MEF was fully prepared for its role in designated contingencies. [FoFs (2) - (24), (65) - (73), (83) - (86) (125) - (143)]
3. Per the scope of my charter, I also sought to assess the effects of COVID-19 on the forming and composite of 15th MEU. Ultimately, I think it would be a mistake to discount or overlook the extraordinary COVID-related demands on leaders, staff, and their Marines and Sailors during this period. The claims on their time and attention surfaced in a number of interviews with several senior officers who described the conditions during this period as second only to their experience in combat. Although many day-to-day activities have since returned to some degree of normality, during the timeframe leading up to the composite of the 15th MEU, the barrage of unknown aspects of the pandemic and frequently changing guidance added layers of complexity to the normal rhythm of I MEF activities. The I MEF and MSC leadership and staff oversight required to receive, interpret, and apply the evolving COVID policy guidance was immense. I believe this significant latent condition added its own unique layer of friction to routine commander and staff activities associated with compositing a MEU. [FoFs (11), (19), (25) - (64), (93), (99), (118) - (119), (141) - (143), (148), (151) - (154), (156) - (157), (172)]
4. I MEF was also responsible for executing a number of nonstandard missions in this period, which produced a task-saturated environment at a time when the 1st Marine Division had no assigned ADC, and key billet holders, such as the I MEF Deputy CG and 1st Marines CO, were executing a major exercise in the Middle East. Examples of these additive tasks include augmenting the Customs and Border Patrol activities on the southwest U.S. border and Defense Support to Civil Authorities (a platoon-sized element for security to the USNS MERCY in Los Angeles). In addition, I MEF was planning for major combat operations due to heightened tensions with Iran in January 2020, supporting ROM and additional staff requirements at MCRD San Diego, establishing socially distanced COVID quarantine facilities for up to 12,000 deploying and redeploying Marines, and dealing with other emerging requirements related to rescheduling and re-scoping exercises, training, and deployments. [FoFs (4) - (5), (11) - (12), (14), (18), (22), (25) - (64), (69), (91) - (93), (100) - (120), (132) - (143), (148) - (150), (155) - (157), (189) - (211)]

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5. Specific to the forming and composite of the 15th MEU, I believe the CG, 1st MARDIV leveraged the reasonable, expected professional conduits for frequent, detailed, two-way communication with the 3d AA Bn Commander. The latter, however, did not convey the significant risks in his command related to the AA platoon, specifically its declining materiel readiness and lack of predeployment (waterborne) training opportunities and MCCRE or other formal evaluation. The Division CG received ample personal communication from the 3d AA Bn Commander. It was generally positive and contained very few indications that would have alerted the CG or his staff to personnel, training, and materiel readiness concerns. [FoFs (16) - (18), (20) - (24), (27) - (29), (65), (68), (69), (71), (121), (136), (210) - (213), (225)]

6. Based on the erroneous belief that the 15th MEU's AA platoon would be able to conduct MET-oriented training with Company B, 1/4 during NF20, the CO, 3d AA Bn deployed the platoon to NF20 less than 60 days before the MEU composite date of April 20, 2020. I believe this was a critical decision that later contributed to the AA platoon's performance on July 30, 2020. The NF20 deployment did not permit the platoon to conduct adequate pre-composite waterborne training together as a small unit and potentially with Company B, or to conduct thorough inspections prior to the JLTI. The CO, 3d AA Bn also forwent a prime opportunity for the platoon to conduct amphibious training in Exercise IRON FIRST with the 15th MEU CE. In these decisions, he was not aided by the churn of personnel rotations through key battalion billets, many of which were beyond his control. [FoFs (5), (74), (115) - (120), (121), (136) - (138), (182) - (187), (189) - (192), (199), (225)]

7. Orders and authoritative documents, from HQMC down to and including the battalion level, plainly direct that the major elements forming a MEU will conduct a MCCRE prior to composite. Some of these documents are ambiguous regarding the requirements for units below the battalion and squadron levels, but I believe the spirit of these orders is clear in that all units deploying with a MEU should receive some type of formal evaluation by competent authority prior to compositing with their respective GCE, ACE, or LCE. [FoFs (75), (86), (95) - (97), (115) - (124), (138), (139), (144) - (149), (153), (160), (164), (182) - (192)]

a. The CO, 3d AA Bn was responsible for conducting a MCCRE of the AA platoon and did not do so. In his oversight role, the CG, 1st MARDIV was responsible for ensuring the 3d AA Bn evaluated the AA platoon and did not do so.

b. A formal evaluation that included waterborne operations of the 15th MEU's AA platoon and Company B, 1/4 prior to composite would likely have revealed training gaps and deficiencies. However, a comprehensive review of information across the Marine Corps indicated that AA platoons have generally not conducted stand-alone MCCREs. The 15th MEU AA platoon's lack of a MCCRE was not an anomaly.

c. The I MEF and 1st MARDIV orders and current practices regarding the MCCRE also warrant a review. These orders mention conducting a MCCRE during SLTE events like ITX at MCAGCC at 29 Palms, which of course sits in the middle of the Mojave Desert. So absent amphibious training conditions associated with a MEU deployment, the MCCRE is not completely fail-safe.

8. Amphibious operations are inherently complex and dangerous, which places a premium on proper training and equally constant efforts to monitor and mitigate risks. [FoFs (20) - (23), (75), (112) - (113), (126), (141), (142), (151) - (154), (165) - (181)]

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a. The CO, 1/4 was responsible for ensuring UET certification training for Company B Marines and did not do so. In their oversight roles, both the CO, 1st Marine Regiment and CG, 1st MARDIV were responsible for ensuring 1/4 was compliant with UET training requirements and did not do so.

b. However, UET training alone is not a panacea. Waterborne training should incorporate not just elements of water survival and egress certification but also repetitive evacuation drills, which likely would have been of greater value in preventing this mishap.

c. Moreover, UET training is but one requirement competing with a host of others that a commander must prioritize and accomplish before deploying. Relative to statistics in other MEUs and BLTs, and based on completion rates following the April 2020 composite, I believe it is clear that the 15th MEU and BLT 1/4 were making steady progress toward the UET goal.

9. Materiel readiness programs are fundamental building blocks that support safe and effective operations, and I thoroughly reviewed the 3d AA Bn's materiel readiness programs, training, and policies. [FoFs (13), (14), (17), (18), (22), (23), (29), (68), (71), (73), (104), (105), (118) - (124), (128) - (130), (193) - (229)]

a. The CO, 3d AA Bn was responsible for ensuring the command trained and equipped the AA platoon for its deployment with the 15th MEU and did not do so. In his oversight role, the CG, 1st MARDIV was responsible for ensuring 3d AA Bn executed these tasks to the expected standards and did not adequately do so.

b. The results of the 2019 FSMAO and the 2020 LRE demonstrate 3d AA Bn struggled to manage maintenance and readiness in accordance with applicable Marine Corps Orders. This trend should have been evident to the Division Commander and his staff and more emphasis placed on ensuring the 3d AA Bn followed through with detailed corrective action plans. However, the overall readiness within 3d AA Bn was reported at a level consistently above average for AAVP7s (the primary vehicle type of AAV) throughout the FMF. As well, DRRS reports and SITREPS from the CO, 3d AA Bn provided a somewhat mixed signal about the battalion's true maintenance condition.

c. Although this investigation focuses on a relatively narrow window of time leading up to the composite of the 15th MEU, a review of the AAV maintenance from the JLTI on April 20, 2020 through the mishap on July 30, 2020 indicated that 11 of the 14 AAVs were in discrete non-operational states over the 122-day period. I believe the readiness of the AA platoon was below the expectations of a platoon preparing to deploy with a MEU, largely due to a lack of time to receive and work on their vehicles prior to composite.

10. In the process of reviewing 3d AA Bn's activities, I assessed its plans for RCCA vehicles. I found that the CO, 3d AA Bn kept the Division Commander and other stakeholders appropriately informed about programs to include RCCA and the use of administrative deadline. Moreover, the requirement to provide 14 operationally ready vehicles to support the MEU AA platoon remained separate and distinct from RCCA and other initiatives. Put another way, I do not believe the RCCA program had a measurable impact on the 15th MEU AA platoon; it did not prevent the battalion from sourcing 14 operational AAVs from a pool of 199 vehicles on hand. [FoFs (209), (210), (224) - (229)]

11. On July 11, 2019 an AAV training with 26th MEU sank while transiting from ship to shore. This Class B mishap was similar to the one that occurred a year later, although a key difference was that

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Marines survived the 2019 incident principally, in my view, because the vehicle commander made the right choice to evacuate the AAV as water levels rose. Two points are worth highlighting. First, the evacuation procedures worked as intended, validating the training these Marines received. Second, the lessons from this prior incident were disseminated via formal Safety Division conduits. As a learning organization, I believe the Marine Corps should consider the manner and method in which it distributes and assimilates mishap lessons to ensure widest possible dissemination in operations and training circles. In this case, wider awareness of the 2019 mishap might have reinforced the timing of key decisions for small unit leaders involved with the 2020 mishap. [FoFs (75), (164) – (167), (171)]

12. The CG, I MEF relied on the AC/S G-7/EOTG to provide training, oversight, and standardization of MEU certifications, a feature provided by EOTGs in all three MEFs. Accordingly, EOTGs merit some level of oversight by an outside entity to assess the appropriate rigor of their PTP courses and the need for specific MOS skills on the EOTG staff. [FoFs (7) - (9), (12), (76) – (81), (95) - (99), (158), (162), (163)]

13. I believe the Marine Corps' historic expertise in amphibious operations has atrophied over the past two decades. This likely stems from recurring unit deployments to support Operations IRAQI FREEDOM, ENDURING FREEDOM, and INHERENT RESOLVE, which consisted mostly of land-based operations and generated a predominantly desert-focused predeployment training regimen, and correlates closely to the reduced availability of U.S. Navy amphibious ships for training. These circumstances were certainly at play in the forming and composite of the 15th MEU, and further compounded by gaps in key leadership billets at critical times during an increasingly task-saturated COVID environment. [FoFs (3) - (5), (12), (22), (25) - (64), (74) - (82), (91), (93), (97) - (107), (109) - (114), (117), (120), (132) - (137), (140), (143), (148), (150), (156), (159), (163), (164)]

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In the course of reviewing all applicable orders and directives, I found instances in which minor clarifications would help resolve potential differences in interpretation. For example, MCCRE orders should acknowledge that these events are rarely executed below the company or detachment level, especially for independent battalions and detachment-sourcing squadrons. In this case commanders should conduct an appropriately tailored, formal assessment of every unit regardless of size. For UET training, while the spirit of applicable orders is clear, the letter is not. These orders must ensure that SWET is not viewed under any circumstance as a substitute for full UET. I recommend revising MCO 3502.3C as suggested above. All other formal documents pertaining to this investigation provided reasonable guidance to decision makers at the battalion and above levels.

2. Additionally, MCO 3502.3C should direct the MSCs to form the MSEs prior to the directed composite date to stabilize personnel and prepare for the PTP as an individual element. This affords newly formed MSEs time to accomplish individual and small unit training requirements prior to beginning the PTP as part of a full MAGTF.

3. I recommend a review of the Marine Corps water survival program to incorporate both evacuation and egress training to facilitate service-level coordination and oversight. The Marine Corps should also consider partnering with experts such as the Naval Survival Training Institute.

4. I recommend conducting a Tri-MEF Course Content Review Board of the MEF-managed Materiel Readiness Training Centers. Furthermore, Deputy Commandant (DC), Installation and Logistics and CG, TECOM should conduct a holistic review of maintenance management training at applicable entry level and career progression courses conducted at formal learning centers. Both of these efforts would include

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the GCSS-MC Program Office and FSMAO, and continue to provide supporting messaging from senior leaders to foster a culture that encourages engaged leadership in materiel readiness.

5. TECOM should review the curricula of PME courses as well as applicable career progression courses to ensure Marine leaders are well prepared to serve in a MEU MSE or as part of a MEU staff. Furthermore, the enterprise should strengthen and leverage existing courses at the Expeditionary Warfare Training Groups in order enhance the knowledge of key leaders and staff of the MEUs.

6. The 3d AA Bn was the subject of three formal inspections between July 2019 and July 2020, which identified non-compliance and should have generated concern regarding the materiel readiness of the battalion as a whole and its execution of tasks such as preparing a platoon for deployment. Through the process of conducting this investigation, I identified some shortfalls in the Service's formal inspection processes. Specifically, current inspections assess many but not all of the logistics functions. The removal, consolidation, and/or absence of detailed questions regarding individual training events, quality control procedures, publications, licensing, and dispatching may create vulnerability and consequently expose battalions and squadrons to risk. I recommend a holistic review of the FSMAO, LRE, CGIP, and other inspection programs to address issues related to this mishap. Furthermore, I recommend a review of applicable orders to ensure controls for oversight of and compliance with unit level corrective action plans.

7. The 3d AA Bn's quality control procedures and practices, such as pre-JLTI inspections, were inherently limited not necessarily due to internal management, but because of the lack of formal training for quality control personnel. The lack of formal education was evident in the maintenance inspections and the subpar follow-up to identified discrepancies. Unlike the aviation community, much of the ground community lacks the technical training and knowledge in critical quality control billets, which contributes to practices based on subjective individual experience and on-the-job training. Service orders including MCO 4790.2 "Field-level Maintenance Management Policy" direct commanders to establish a quality control program but do not provide additional guidance on the actions required to implement it. Moreover, quality control billets are not typically resourced by billet identification code. I recommend a review of the quality control program and staffing practices for ground units.

8. The normal pace of activities in the Division, Wing, and MLG is challenging enough without the demands created by a global pandemic. In this instance, key leaders throughout I MEF had less time to observe, assess, and reflect on the performance and direction of their organizations. Leadership capacity mattered in this mishap. I therefore recommend the Marine Corps assign brigadier generals or post-command colonels to deputy positions in each Division and Wing.

9. In 1998 Lance Corporal Jason Rother died in a tragic mishap after a Combined Arms Exercise (CAX) at 29 Palms. As both a captain and lieutenant colonel-level commander, my senior commanders directed me to review the resulting Rother investigation before conducting other CAXs. The Lejeune Leadership Institute at Quantico, VA maintains a formal "Rother Incident" case study available for Marines of all ranks and specialties. In light of the AAV mishap, this sort of approach – involving both informal and formal mechanisms such as the new Mishap Library – is worthy of institutionalizing across the Marine Corps. Therefore, I recommend TECOM, with SDMC support, explore this effort.

10. In conjunction with COMMARFORPAC, COMMARFORCOM, and DC, Plans, Policies, and Operations, I recommend CG, TECOM examine the merit of establishing stronger oversight mechanisms and processes for EOTGs in respective MEFs.

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11. I recommend the ACMC forward this report to the Commandant for further consideration and action as appropriate.

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)

C. E. MUNDY/III