#### UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS



U.S. MARINE CORPS FORCES CENTRAL COMMAND 7115 SOUTH BOUNDARY BOULEVARD MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA 33621-5101

> 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) '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
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- (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

- 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) email of 21 Apr 21
- (56) MCO (65) (50) 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"

- (65) LtCol Brenize Statement to Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)
- (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),
- (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) '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

- (108) SITREPs (9) dated January to June 2020
- (109) MFR from MGySgt (b)(3), (b)(6), 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 ltr 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). , Validation of MCCRE for 3d AABn
- (139) Memorandum for the Record from MGySgt (b)(3), (b)(6), 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) and Mr. (b)(3), (b) 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) and Col (b)(3), of 14 May 20
- (148) 3d AA Brick RE CG Out-Brief Initial Look of May 15, 2020
- (149) Email between Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b) and Col (b)(3), (b) of 14 May 2021 (150) Memorandum for the Record from MGySgt (b)(7), (b)(6), (b)(6), Request for Information for II

#### MEF and 2d MarDiv MCCRE and UET Orders

- (151) Email between Col  $^{\text{(b)(3)}}$ , and Col  $^{\text{(b)(3)}}$ , b) of 14 May 2021 (152) 3d AA Bn FSMAO (Countbrief\_v2  $^{\text{(6)}}$ , b)(7)
- (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) to Col (b)(3), (b) 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) 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

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 material 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

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

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 though 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)]

#### 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 predeployment training program schedule. He believed he had had a tight relationship with the I MEF staff. [Encl (19)]

#### TRAINING READINESS

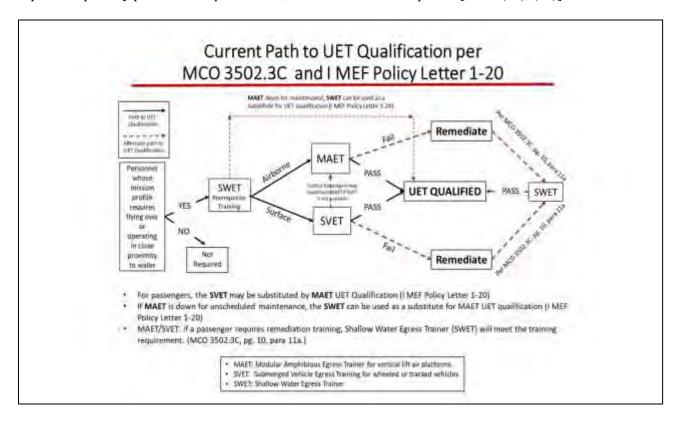
- 144. The Marine Corps and I MEF orders required that MSCs provide properly trained units to the 15th MEU. [Encls (56), (67), (98)]
- 145. The MEF LOI for 15th MEU Deployment 21-1 directed all MEF MSCs to conduct the requisite annual and military occupational specialty (MOS)-specific training and complete 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 preservations 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/MEUEX 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) noted that due to the sustained high operational tempo, he has observed a desynchronization 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

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 JLTI 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 JLTI. [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 GCSS-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 GCSS-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)]

209. The 3d AA Bn DRRS-MC reports from the four months prior to April 20, 2020 did not identify any significant material 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	Overall Bn	Excerpts from 3d AA Bn SITREPS
T 40 00 0000	Readiness	Readiness	HIXTO C. C.
Jan 10 - 23, 2020	AAVP7:	79.77%	"H&S Company is currently preparing the 15th
	73.65%		MEU Platoon and a detachment of Marines to
	AAVC7: 75%		support OPP for Native Fury PTP
T 04 F1 6 0000	AAVR7: 100%	0.4.2007	requirements."
Jan 24 - Feb 6, 2020	AAVP7:	84.39%	"H&S Company is currently preparing the 15th
	84.25%		MEU Platoon for Native Fury 20."
	AAVC7: 75%		
	AAVR7: 100%	0.4.4407	11100 G
Feb 7 - 20, 2020	AAVP7:	84.44%	"H&S Company is preparing the 15th MEU Plt
	88.39%		and a detachment supporting the OPP for
	AAVC7:		Native Fury 20. Executing the PTP
	83.33%		requirements."
	AAVR7: 100%		
Feb 21 - Mar 5,	AAVP7:	90.32%	"H&S Company is conducting CBRN RS&D
2020	89.88%		training and preparing to deploy the 15th MEU
	AAVC7:		Plt for Native Fury."
	91.67%		" H&S Company have had the lead and
	AAVR7: 100%		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:	92.47%	"H&S Company is providing, and supporting,
	92.26%		the AAV Detachment embarked on the USS
	AAVC7: 100%		Comstock for TF Ellis and also supporting
	AAVR7:		Native Fury 20 with an MPF Offload OPP."
	83.33%		
Mar 20 - Apr 2,	AAVP7:	80.77%	" H&S Company have received all elements
2020	79.39%		of their 15th MEU Platoon retrograding from
	AAVC7: 100%		Native Fury 20. They will be receiving their
	AAVR7:		OPP detachment next week. The 15th MEU
	80.00%		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:	83.52%	"The company has also been conducting
	83.64%		equipment JLTIs and preparations to attach the
			15th MEU AAV Platoon to Co B, BLT 1/4."

	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 material readiness briefs was good overall, with no significant issues or red flags that would have alerted 1st MARDIV leadership to a material 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 material readiness policy and procedures. [Encl (113)]

- 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
- 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)]

#### **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)]

- 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)]

- 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
- 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

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

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.

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



# DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS 3000 MARINE CORPS PENTAGON WASHINGTON, DC 20350-3000

IN REPLY REFER TO 5800 ACMC

APR 0 2 2021

From: Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps

To: Commander, Marine Corps Forces Central Command

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 30 JULY 2020

Ref: (a) JAGINST 5800.7G (JAGMAN), Chapter II

- 1. This appoints you, per chapter II of reference (a) to inquire into the facts and circumstances surrounding the forming of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) and actions and decisions associated with the material condition, training, and personnel readiness. These facts, circumstances, actions, and decisions are associated with an assault amphibious vehicle mishap that occurred off of San Clemente Island on 30 July 2020.
- 2. You are appointed as the board president for this command investigation. The Director, Marine Corps Staff will provide you with additional team members as required, including subject-matter-experts, administrative and logistical support.
- 3. You will investigate the facts and circumstances surrounding the following:
  - a. Formation and compositing of the 15th MEU;
  - b. Training and material readiness surrounding the formation and compositing of the 15th MEU; and
  - c. I MEF oversight of the 15th MEU.
- 4. In investigating the facts and circumstances outlined above you must address the following:
  - a. Decisions impacting subject areas outlined in paragraph 3;
- b. The discharge of supervisory and oversight responsibility exercised by the command up to the Marine Expeditionary Force level; and
  - c. COVID-19 impacts.
- 5. You have 30 calendar days from the date of this appointment to complete this investigation. Any request for extension in time will be submitted to me in writing for approval.
- 6. Point of contact for this matter is the Director, Marine Corps Staff,  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}$  or  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}$

GARY L. THOMAS

## **DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**



HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS 3000 MARINE CORPS PENTAGON WASHINGTON, DC 20350-3000

> IN REPLY REFER TO: 5800 DMCS 8 Mar 21

From: Staff Director of the Marine Corps

To: Colonel  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}$ 

 $\begin{array}{c} Colonel \,\,^{(b)(3),\,\,(b)(6),\,\,(b)(7)(c)} \\ Colonel \,\,^{(b)(3),\,\,(b)(6),\,\,(\dot{b})(7)(c)} \end{array}$ 

 $Lieutenant\ Colonel^{\,(b)(3),\ (b)(6),\ (b)(7)(c)}$ 

 $Major^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}$ 

Chief Warrant Officer 5 (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)
Chief Warrant Officer 4 (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)
Chief Warrant Officer 3 (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)
Master Gunnery Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)

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

Subj: APPOINTMENT OF THE INVESTIGATION TEAM TO CONDUCT THE 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 30 JULY 2020

Ref: (a) JAGINST 5800.7G (JAGMAN), Chapter II

(b) ACMC's ltr 5800 ACMC of 2 Apr 2021

- 1. Per chapter II of reference (a) and by reference (b), the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps (ACMC) has appointed the Commander, Marine Corps Forces Central Command (MARCENT) to inquire into the facts and circumstances surrounding the forming of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit and actions and decisions associated with the materiel condition, training, and personnel readiness as these matters relate to an assault amphibious vehicle mishap that occurred off of San Clemente Island on 30 July 2020.
- 2. Per reference (b), this letter appoints you as a member of the team assembled to conduct the aforementioned investigation under the direction of the Commander, MARCENT.
- 3. The ACMC has directed that this investigation be completed no later than 2 May 2021. This appointment is your primary duty and remains as such until the investigation is complete.
- 4. Point of contact in this matter is Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) and (c) the state of the state of the contact in this matter is Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) and (c)(6), (

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

GREGG P. OLSON

Copy to: COMMARCENT

	Name	Rank	Unit	Billet	Form
1	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)	Col	II MEF	Assistant G-4	Live (Transcript)
2	(7)(c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)	LtCol	15th MEU	хо	Live (Transcript)
3	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)	Maj	1stMarDiv	G-3 Training Officer	Live (Transcript)
4	Brenize, Keith C.	LtCol	3d AAV Bn	Commanding Officer	Declined Pursuant to Art 31(b)
5	Bronzi, Christopher J.	Col	15th MEU	Commanding Officer	Written Interrogatories
6	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	Col	1stMarDiv	AC/S G-4	Live (Transcript)
7	Castellvi, Robert F.	MajGen	1stMarDiv	Commanding General	Written Interrogatories
8	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	Col	I MEF	AC/S G-8	Live (Transcript)
9	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	MGySgt	3rd AABn	Bn Logistics Chief	Live (Transcript)
10	Clark, Kevin E.	Col	1stMarReg	Commanding Officer	Live (Transcript)
11	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	LtCol	15th MEU	Operations Officer	Live (Transcript)
12	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)	Col (Ret)	I MEF	Mentor	Live (Transcript)
13	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	LtCol	ACE	Commander Officer	Live (Transcript)
14	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)	Col	1stMarDiv, HqBn	Commanding Officer	Live (Transcript)
	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)	LtCol	I MEF	G-7 Expeditionary Operation Training Group	Live (Transcript)
16	(7)(c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	Col	TT & E Program, MCAGCC	Director	Live (Transcript)
17	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	LtCol	1st MLG	G-4	Live (Transcript)
18	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)	CWO4	3rd AABn	Bn Maintenance Officer	Live (Transcript)
19	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	LtCol	3rd AABn	Bn XO	Live (Transcript)
20	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	Maj	3rd AABn	Operations Officer	Live (Transcript)
21	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)	Col	I MEF	G-35 Future Operations Officer	Live (Transcript)
22	(c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b) (7)(c)	LtCol	1stMarDiv	G-7	Live (Transcript)
	(7)(c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)	MGen	MCCDC	Deputy Commanding General	Live (Transcript)
	(c) (d) (d) (d) (d) (d) (d) (d) (d) (d)	Col	3rd MAW	AC/S G-4	Live (Transcript)
25	(7)(5), (b)(6), (b) (3	Mr.	I MEF	G-3/G-5	Live (Transcript)
26	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	Maj	BLT 1/4	Operations Officer	Live (Transcript)
27	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	LtCol	CLB-15	Commanding Officer	Live (Transcript)
28	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	Mr.	I MEF	Safety Director	Live (Transcript)
29	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7) b	Col	22nd MEU	Commander Officer	Live (Transcript)
30	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	Col (Ret)	I MEF	ATSG	Live (Transcript)
91	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b) (7)(c)	Col (Ret)	1stMarDiv	CoS	Live (Transcript)
32	Osterman, Joseph L.	LtGen (Ret	I MEF	Commanding General	Live (Transcript)
	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	Maj	CJTF-OIR	CJ35 Future Operation Planner	Live (Transcript)
34	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	Maj	I MEF EOTG	Amphibious Raids Branch Officer-in-charge	Live (Transcript)
35		MGySgt	AASBn	Academics Chief	Live (Transcript)
	Regner, Michael J. (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	LtCol	1 Bn/4th Mar Reg	Commanding Officer	Declined Pursuant to Art 31(b)
37		LtCol	1stMarDiv	Material Readiness Officer	Live (Transcript)
	Savage, Thomas B. (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	BGen	I MEF	Deput Commanding General	Live (Transcript)
39	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	Col	I MEF	AC/S G-3	Live (Transcript)
40		Col	1st MLG	G-3	Live (Transcript)
	Shea, Roberta L. (b)(3), (b)(6),	BGen	1stMLG	Commanding General	Live (Transcript)
42 43	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)	Maj	15th MEU	Logistics Officer	Live (Transcript)
43 44	(a)(a), (b)(b), (b) (7)(c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)	Col (Ret)	I MEF	G-7/EOTG Director Operations Officer	Live (Transcript)
		Col (Ret)	3rd MAW		Live (Transcript)
45(b	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)	Col	1st MLG	AC/S G-4	Live (Transcript)
46)	(b)(3), (b)(6), (b) (7)(c)	Col	2nd EOTG	Officer-in-charge	Live (Transcript)

## Organization of the United States Marine Corps



**US Marine Corps** 

(As Amended Through 23 July 2020)

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PCN 144 000050 00

Under the authority, direction, and control of the SECNAV through the CMC, HQMC shall prepare for such employment of the Marine Corps and for such recruiting, organizing, supplying, equipping (including research and development), training, servicing, mobilizing, demobilizing, administering, and maintaining of the Marine Corps, and will assist in the execution of any power, duty, or function of the Secretary or the CMC.

The function, composition, and general duties of HQMC are defined in Title 10, United States Code (USC), Subtitle C, Part I, Chapter 506, *Headquarters, Marine Corps*.

Most supporting activities report to the CMC or the ACMC; however, Marine Corps Systems Command (MARCORSYSCOM) reports directly to the assistant SECNAV, Research, Development, and Acquisition. Supporting activities include, but are not limited to, Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC), MARCORSYSCOM, Marine Corps Recruiting Command (MCRC), and MCOTEA [Marine Corps Operational Test and Evaluation Activity].

Marine Corps embassy security forces are under the control of the Secretary of State and provide security and services or perform other special duties for agencies other than the DON. Assignment of the missions of these forces and the personnel to them are specified by the supported agency and approved by the CMC.

External Marine Corps support to other activities and agencies includes individual manpower provided to joint, DOD, US Navy, and other activities as required. Additionally, organizations, such as Marine Corps Embassy Security Group forces and Marine Cryptologic Support Battalion (MCSB) forces, are organized by the CMC for missions directed by the Secretary of State or the heads of the National Security Agency/ Central Security Service (NSA/CSS).

## **Marine Corps Operating Forces**

Marine Air-Ground Task Forces. The Marine Corps generally operates as MAGTFs, which are integrated, combined arms forces that include air, ground, and logistic units under a single commander. Marine air-ground task forces are organized, trained, and equipped from the operating forces of Marine Forces Pacific (MARFORPAC), Marine Forces Command (MARFORCOM), and Marine Forces Reserve (MARFORRES). Commander, MARFORPAC and Commander, MARFORCOM provide the geographic combatant commanders (GCCs) with scalable MAGTFs that possess the unique ability to project mobile, reinforceable, sustainable combat power across a range of military operations. Commander, MARFORRES provides ready and responsive Reserve Marine forces and Marines who augment and reinforce Active Component MAGTFs in their mission accomplishment.

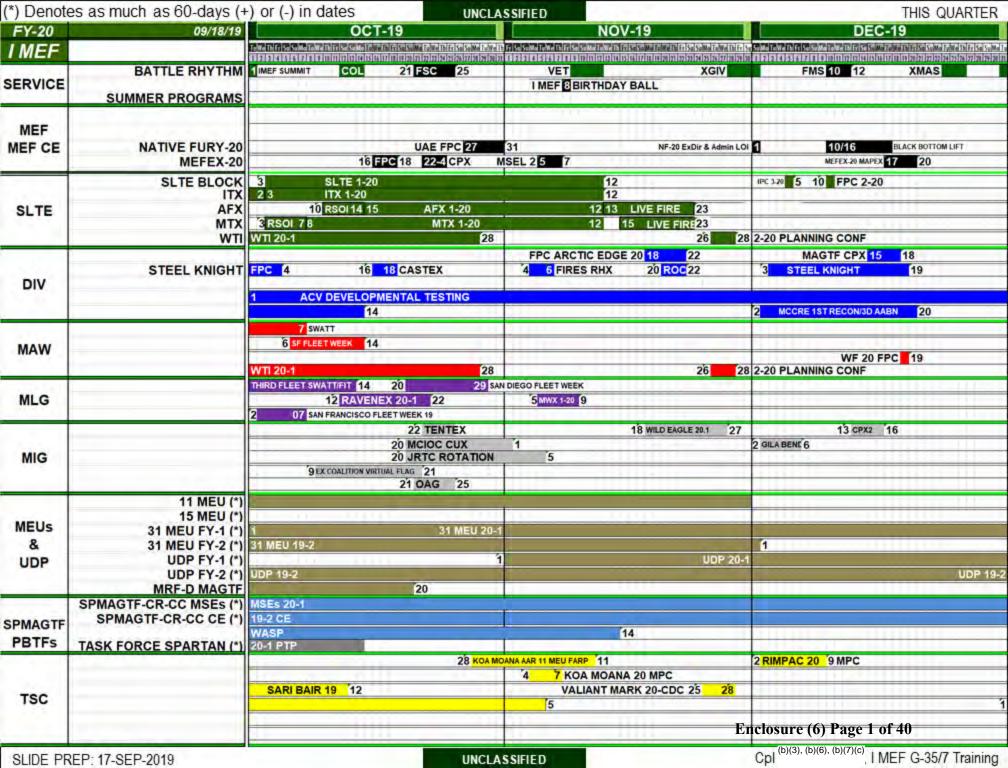
As depicted in figure 1-2, on page 1-4, a MAGTF consists of four key elements: a command element (CE), a ground combat element (GCE), an aviation combat element (ACE), and a logistics combat element (LCE).

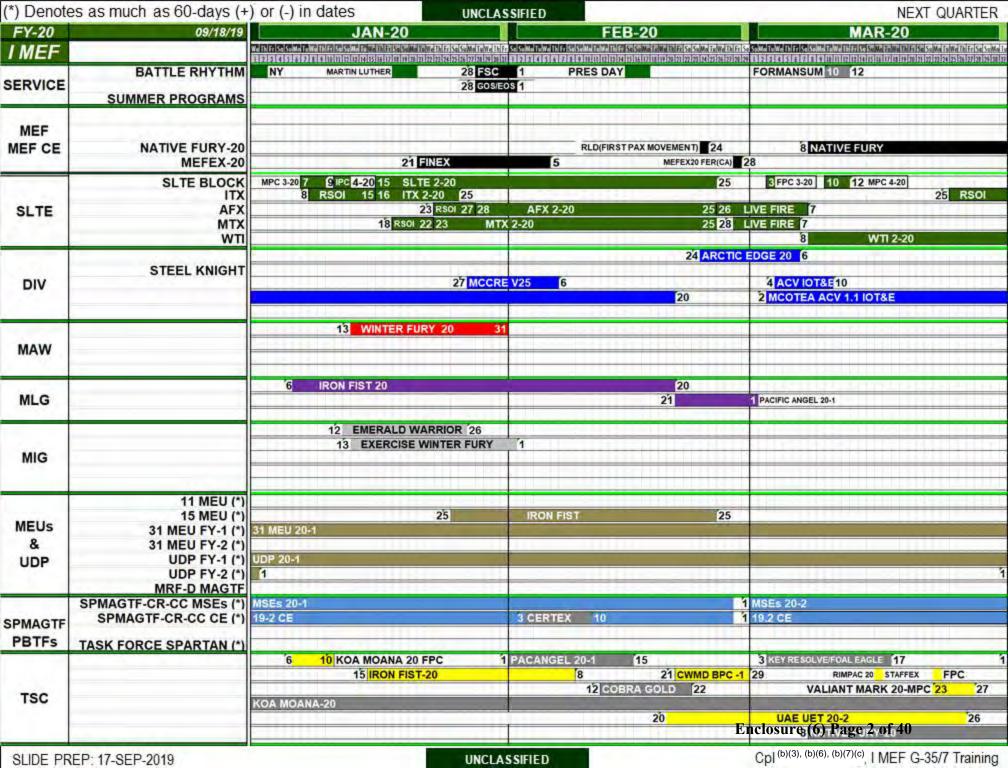
**Marine Expeditionary Force.** The Marine expeditionary force (MEF) is the principal Marine Corps warfighting organization. It is capable of missions across a range of military operations, to include amphibious assault and sustained operations ashore in any environment. With appropriate augmentation, the MEF CE is capable of performing as a joint task force (JTF) headquarters.

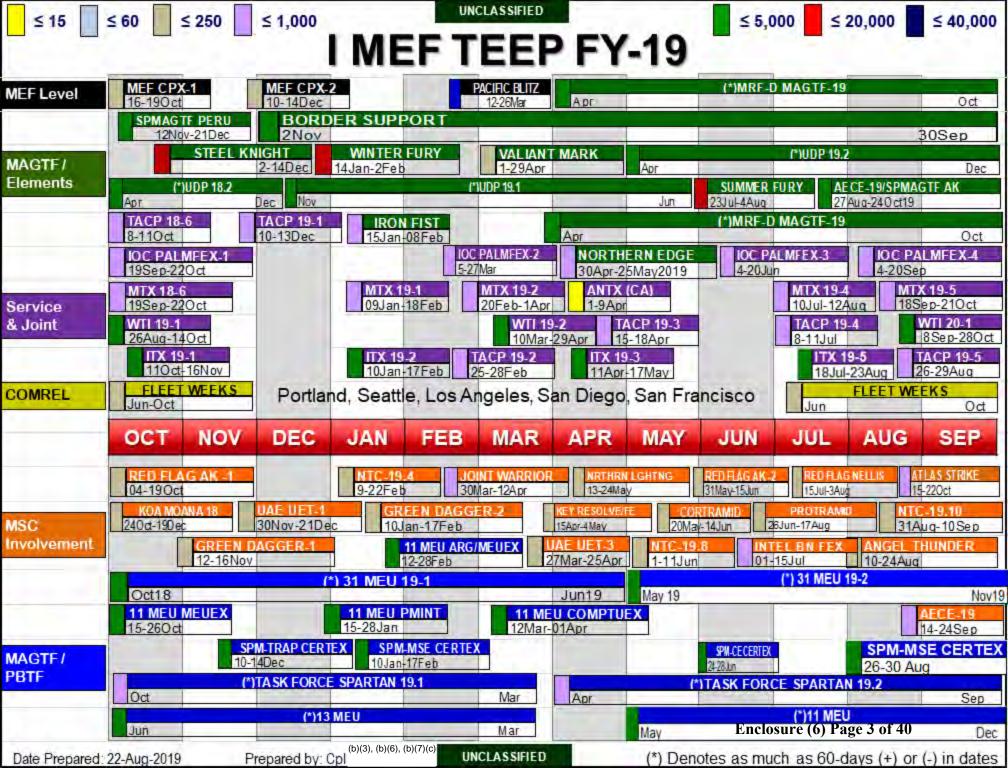
There are three standing MEFs: I MEF, based in southern California and Arizona; II MEF, based in Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina; and III MEF, based in Japan and Hawaii. Each standing MEF consists of a permanent CE, one Marine division (MARDIV), one Marine aircraft wing (MAW), and one Marine logistics group (MLG). These major commands constitute the primary reservoir of combat capabilities from which MAGTFs are sourced. See figure 1-3, on page 1-5, for a notional MEF structure.

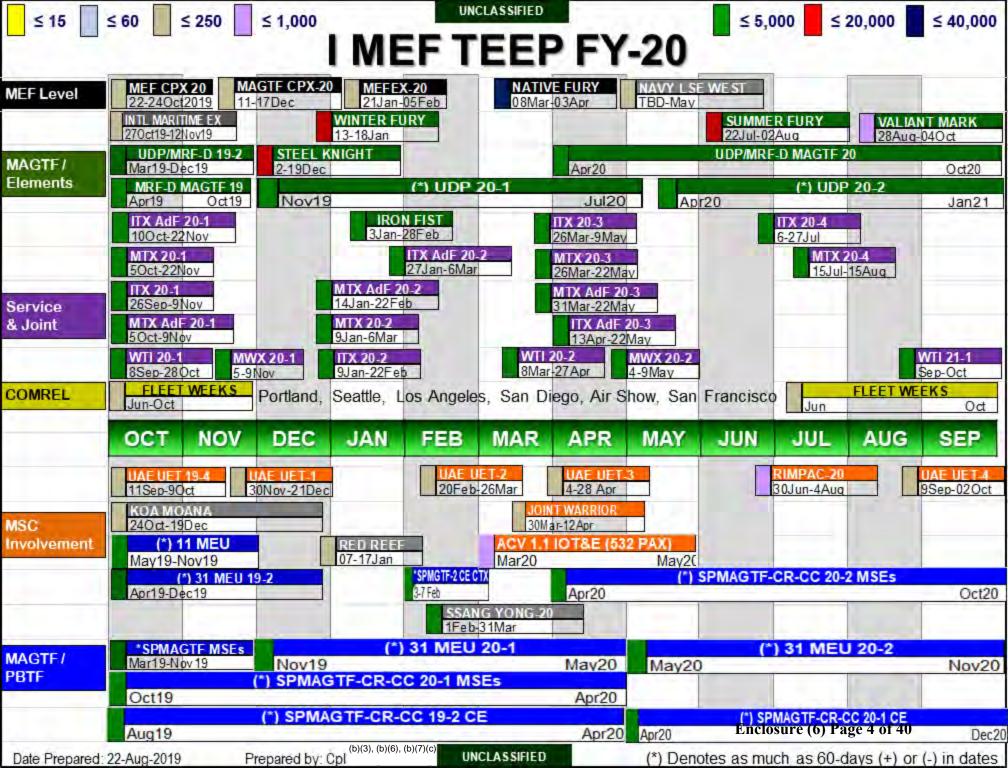
## Encl (5) I MEF FY 20-21 Campaign Plan

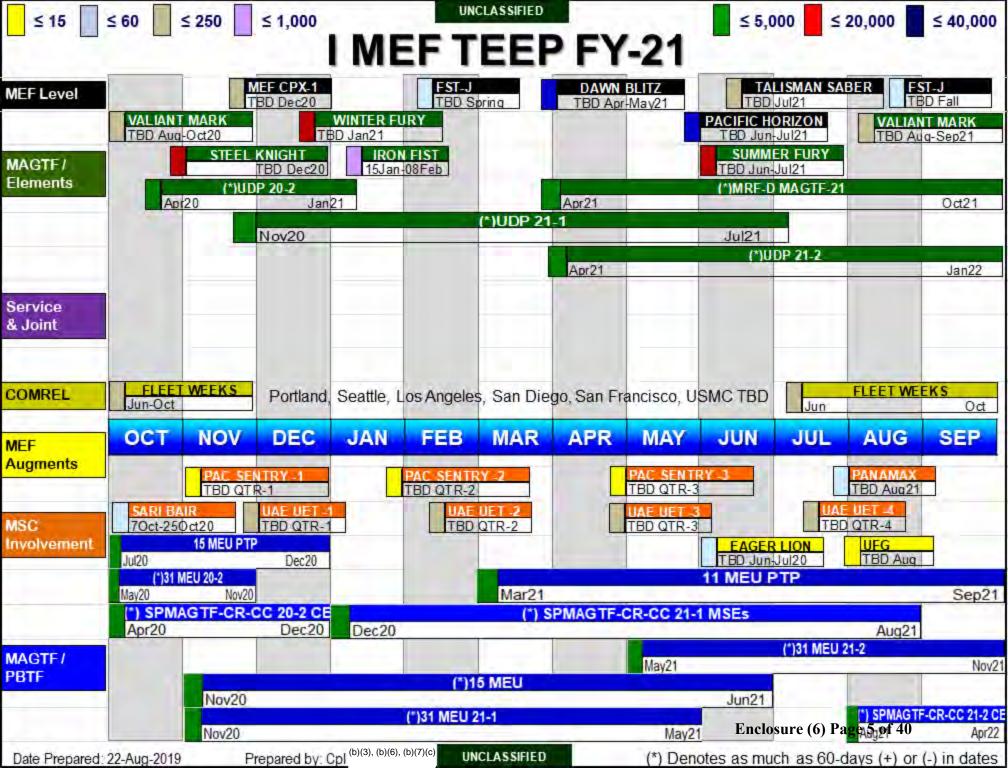
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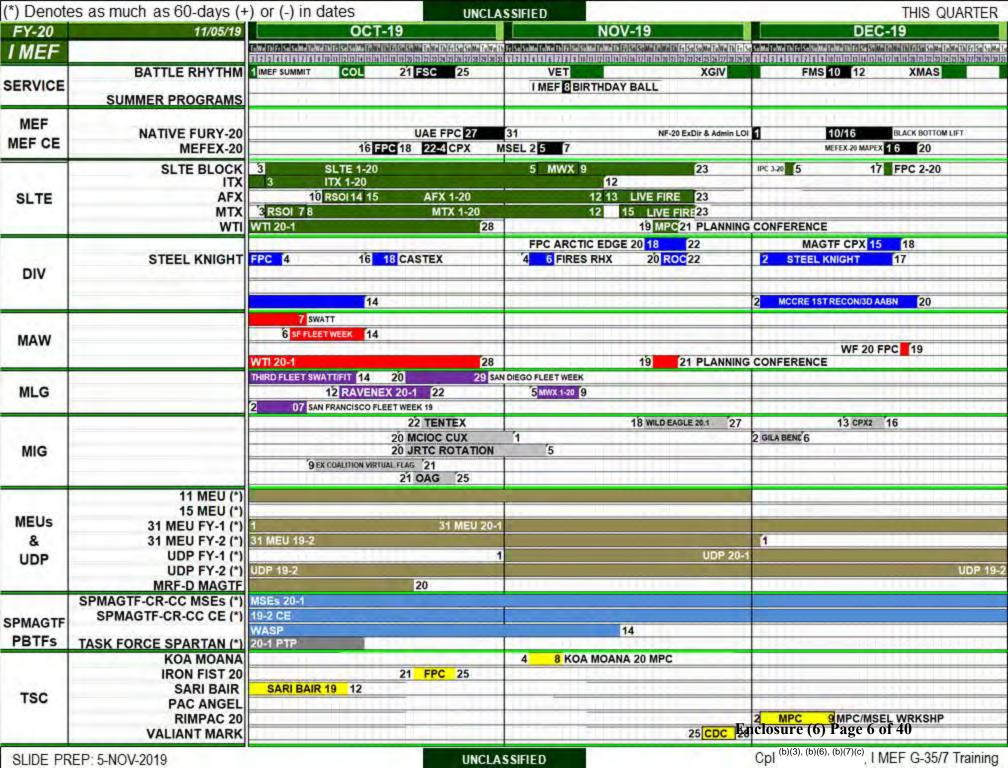


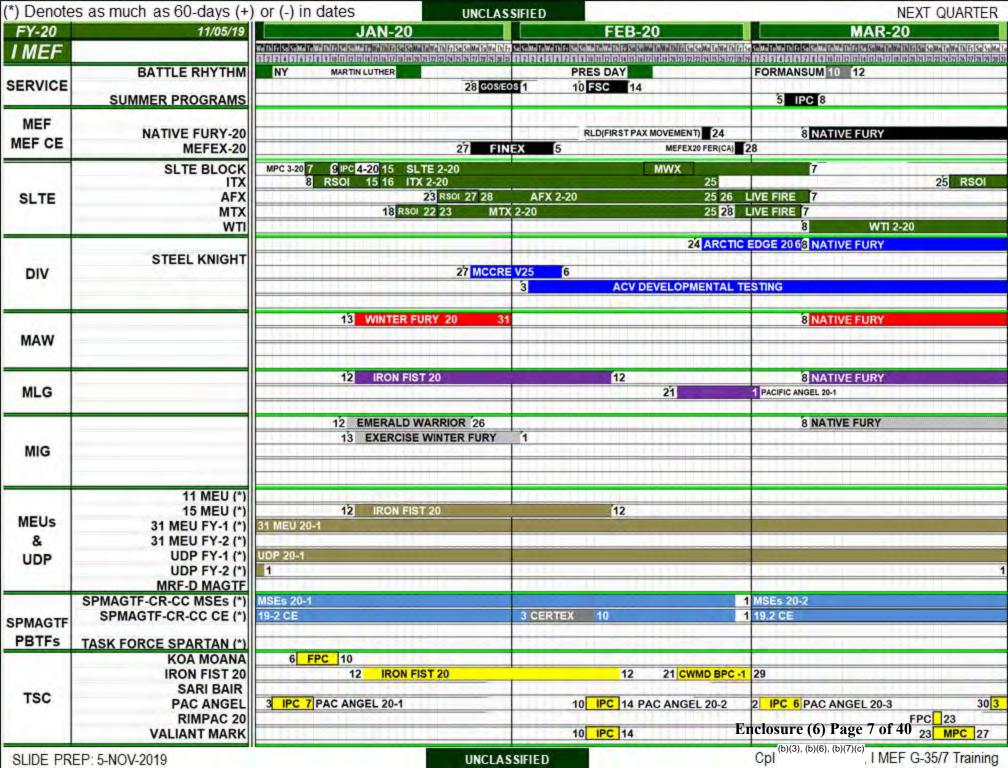


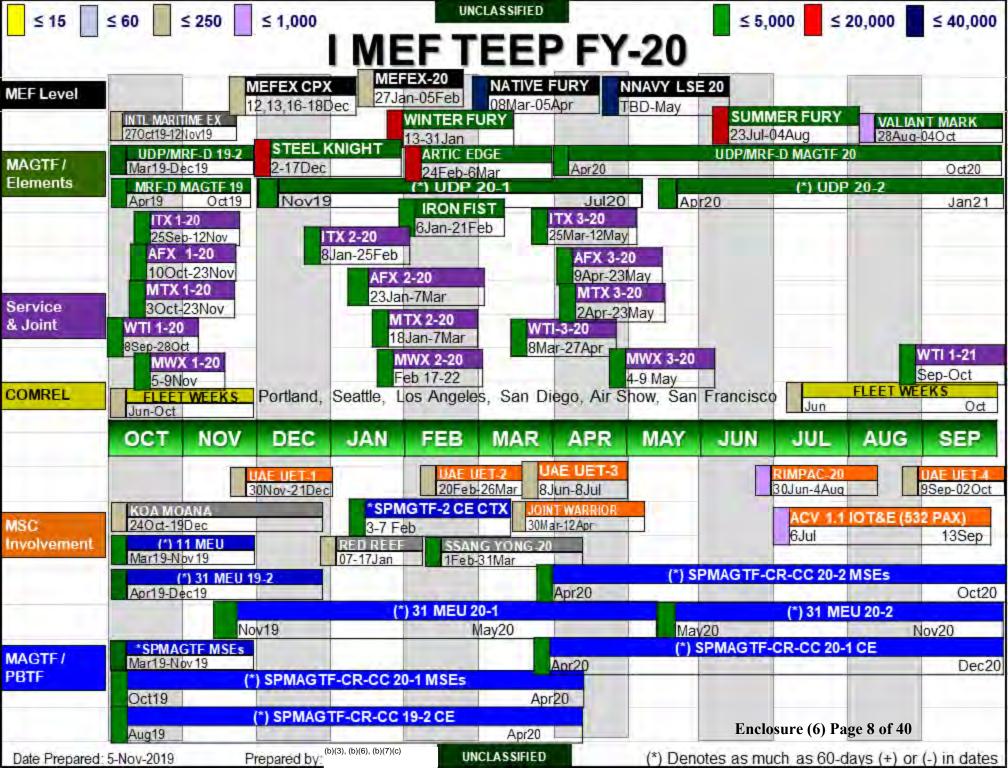


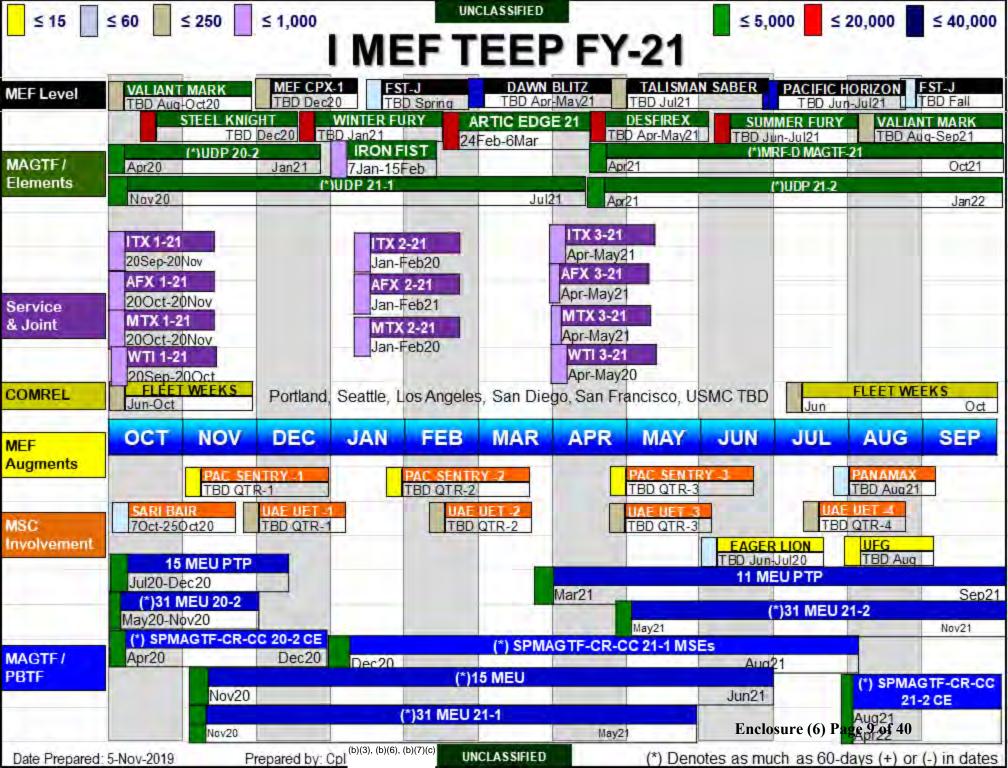


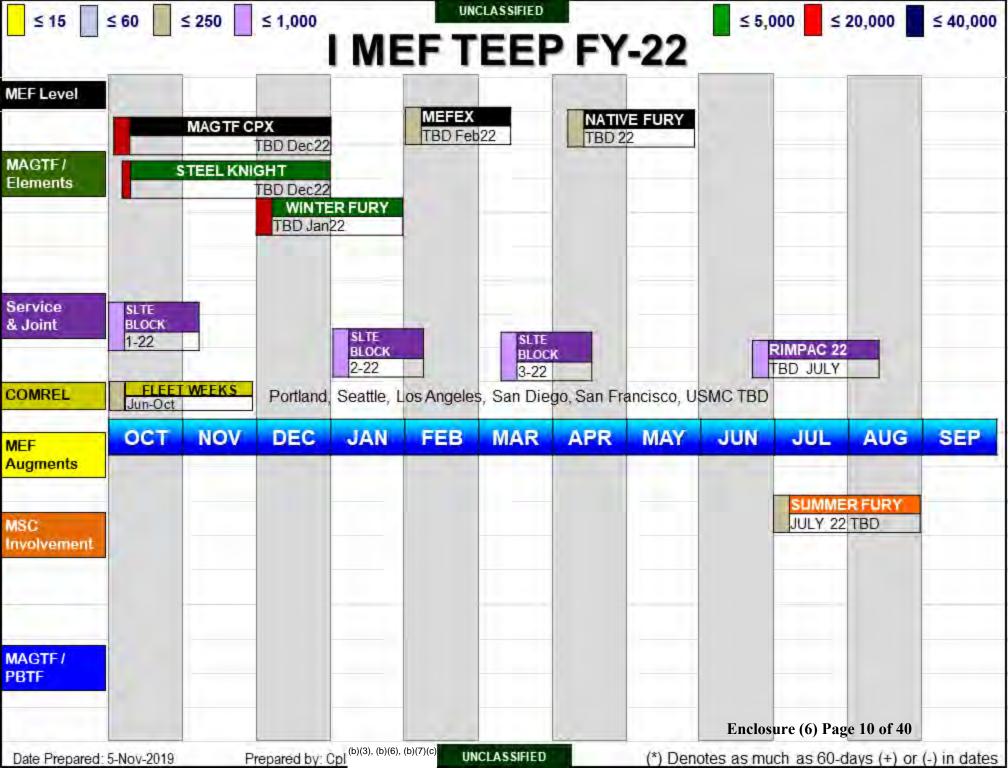


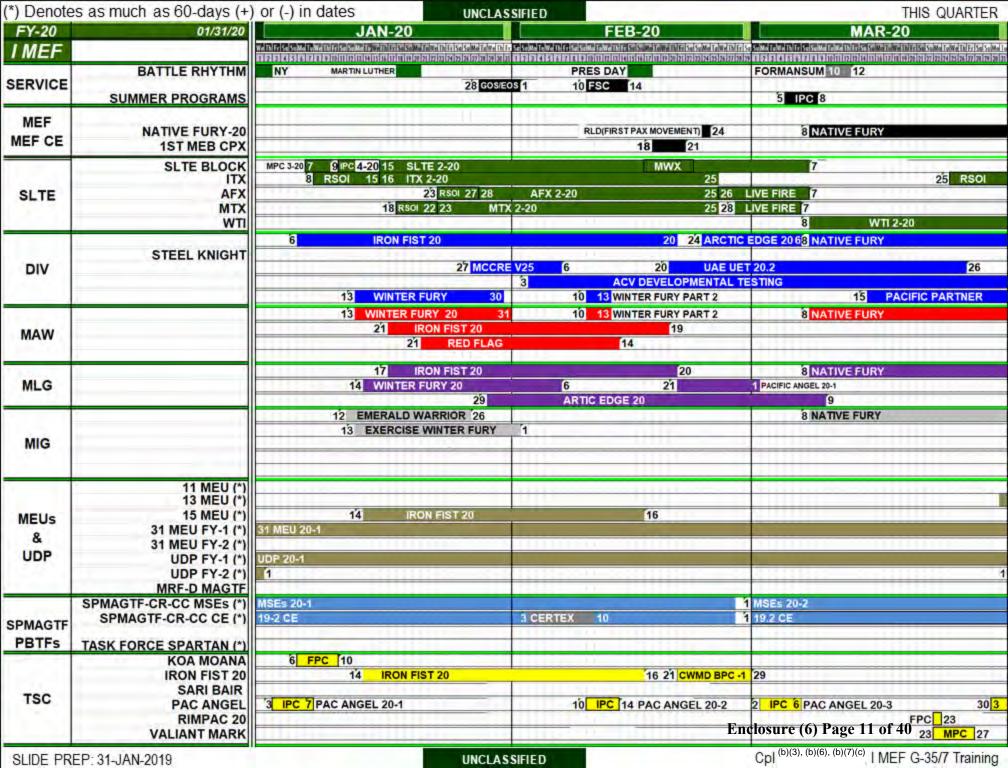


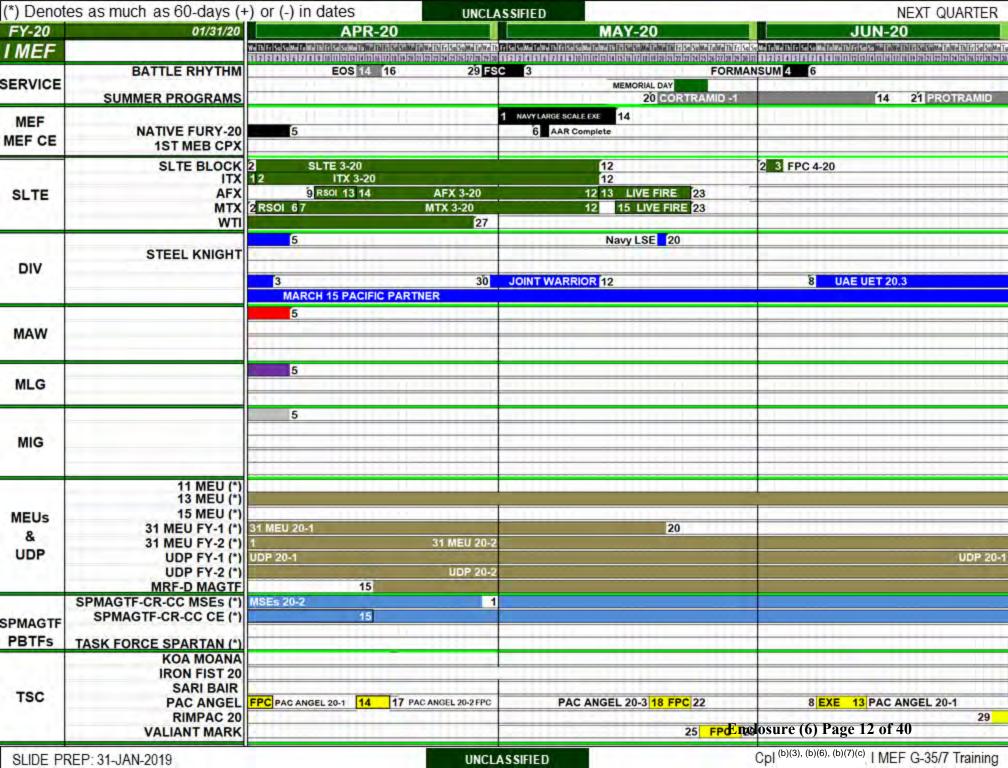


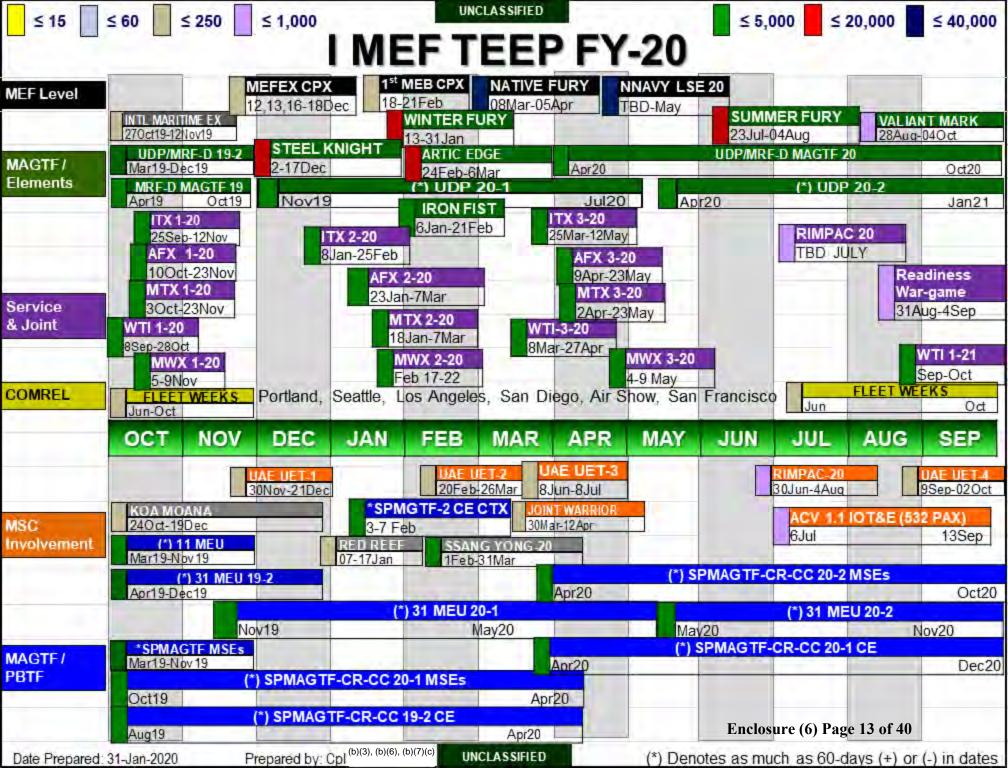


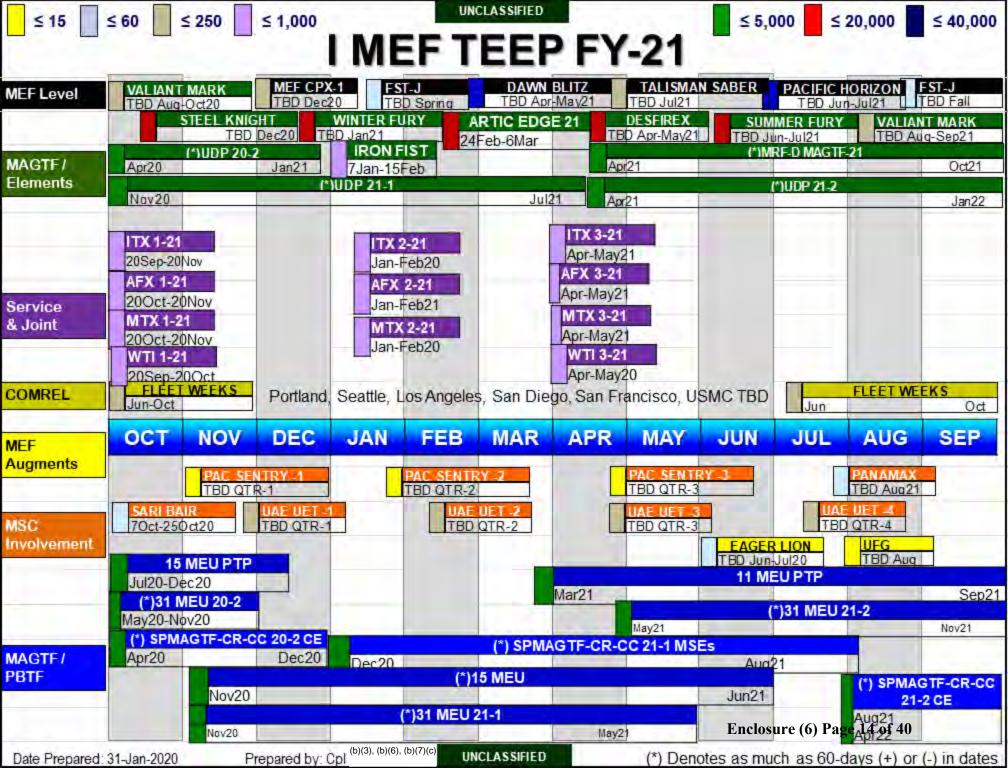


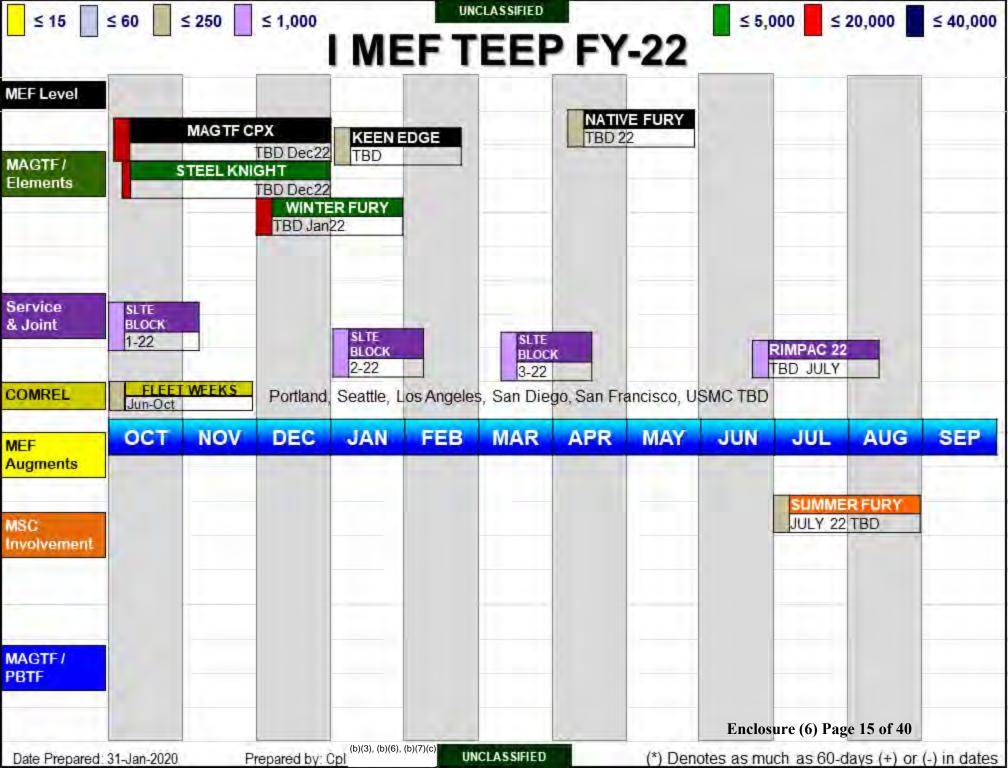


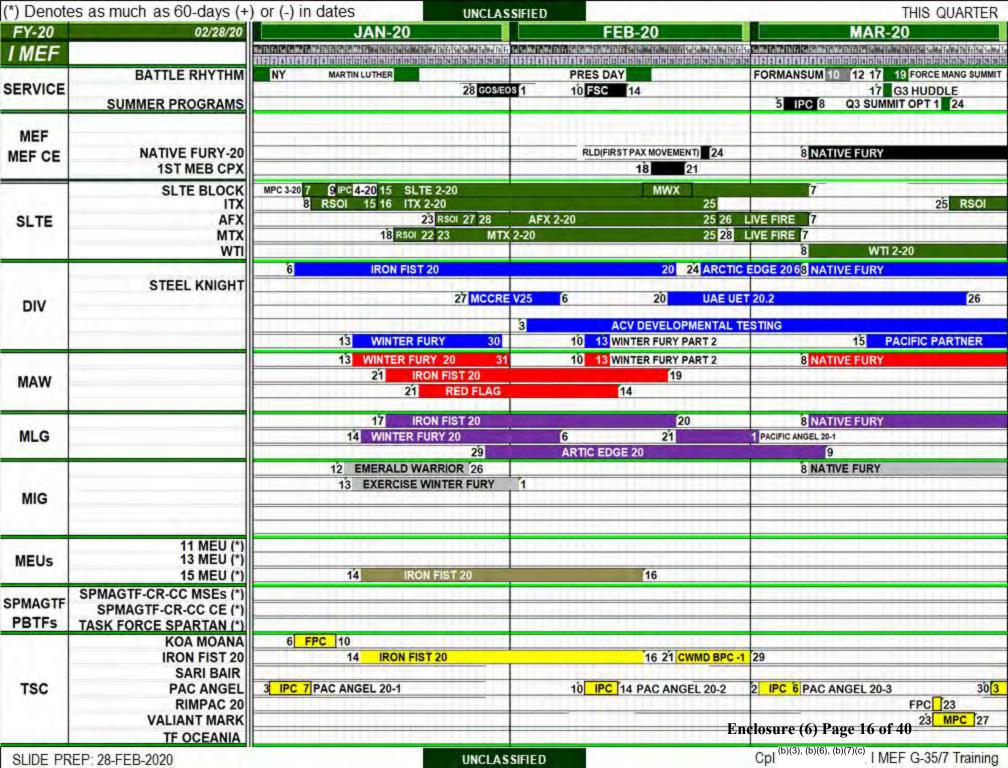


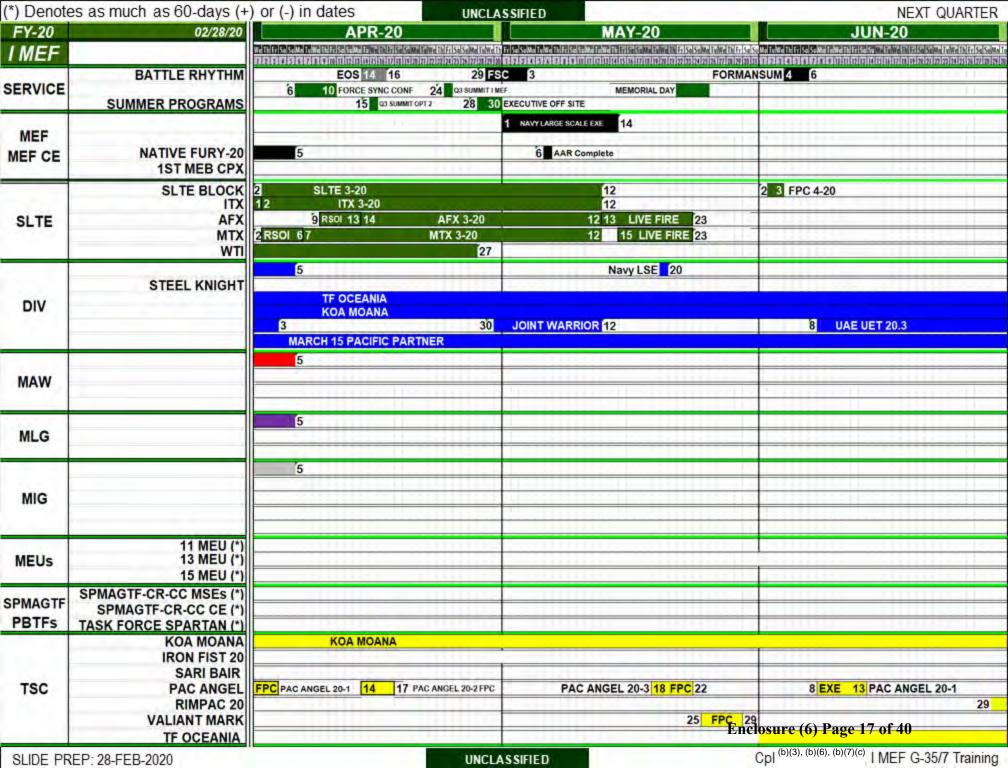


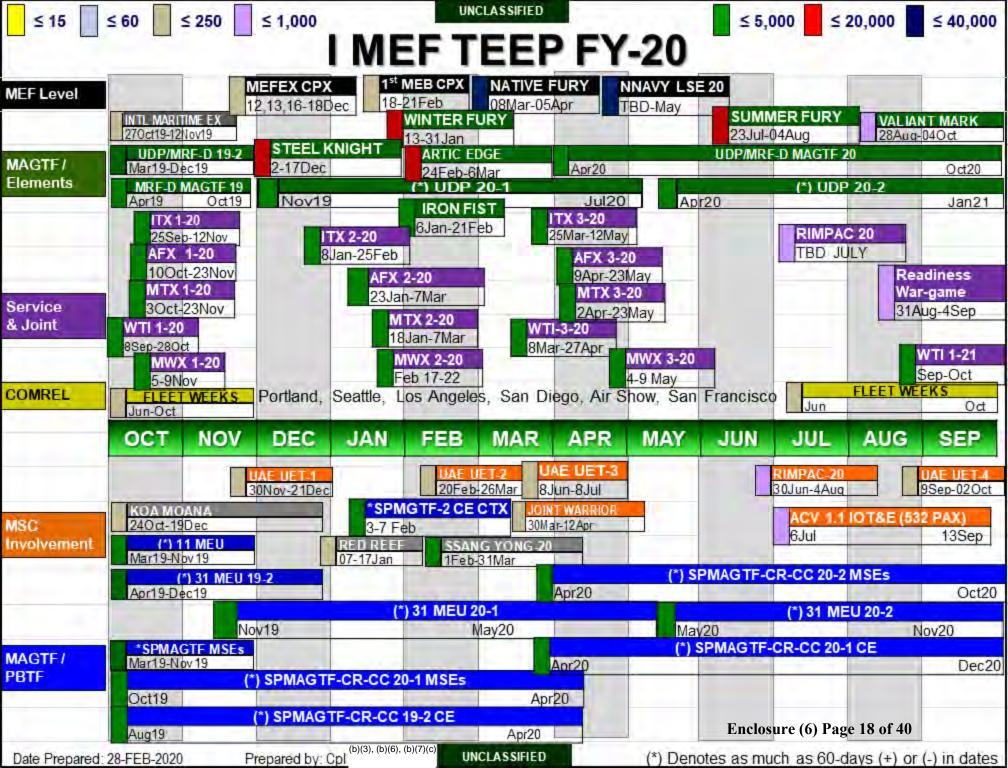


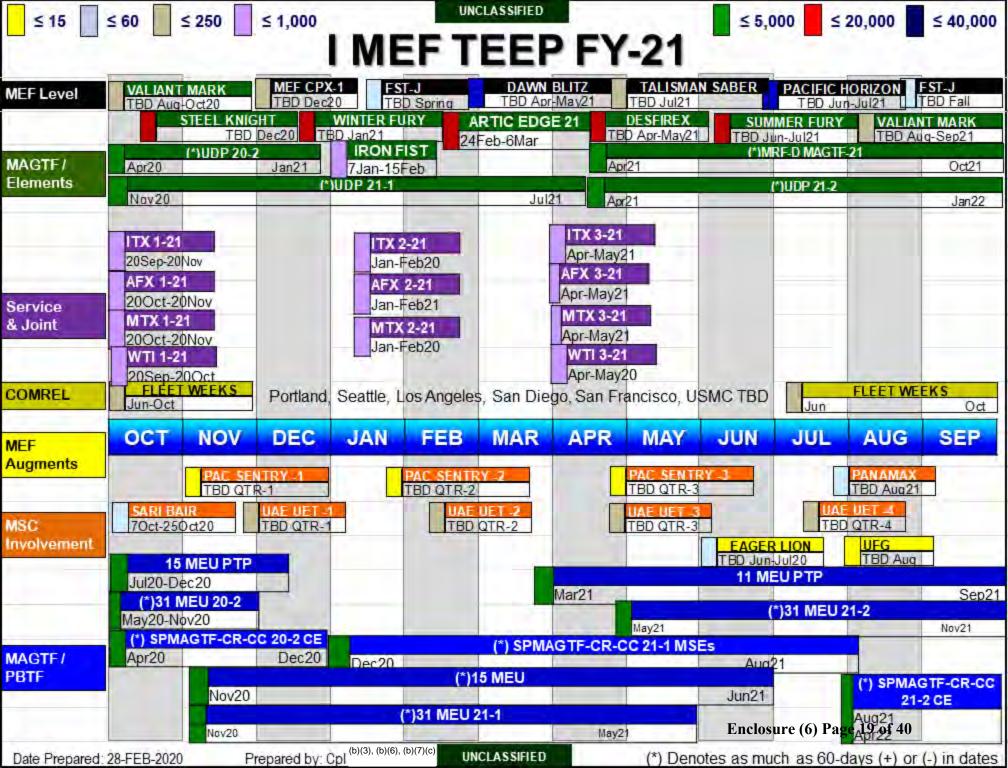


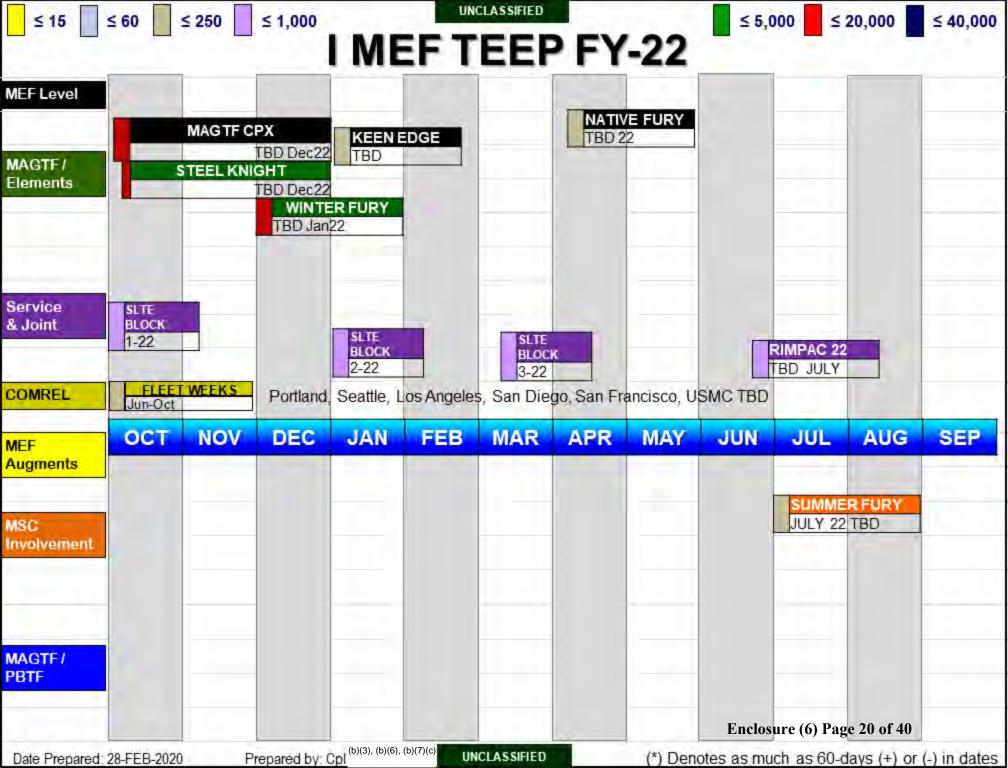


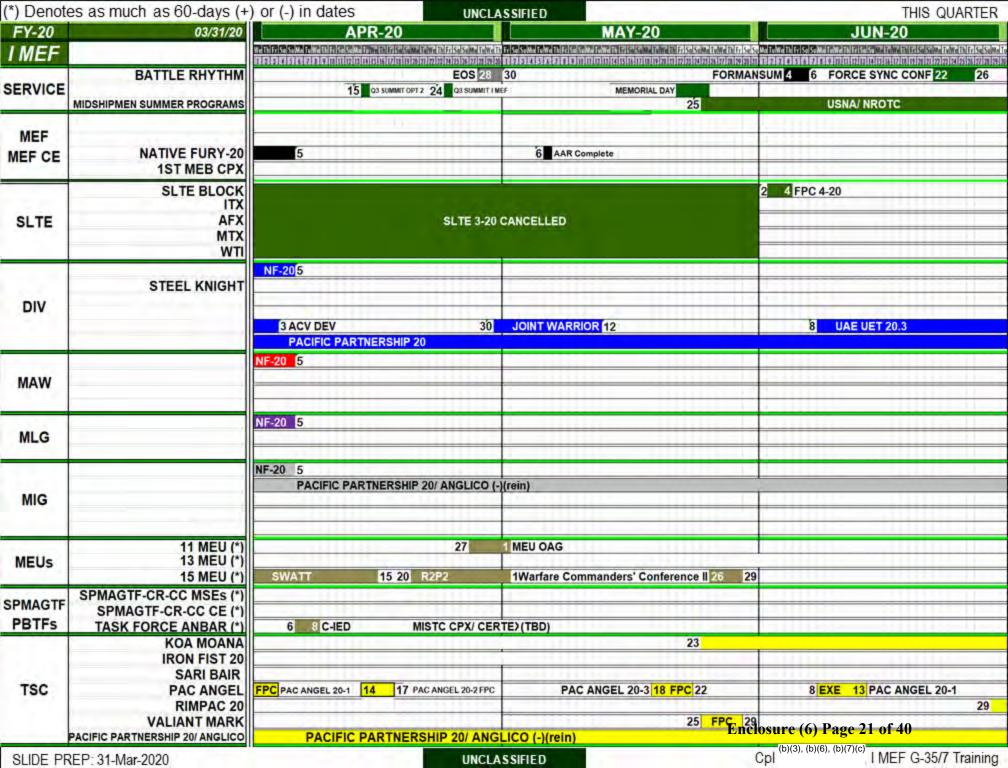


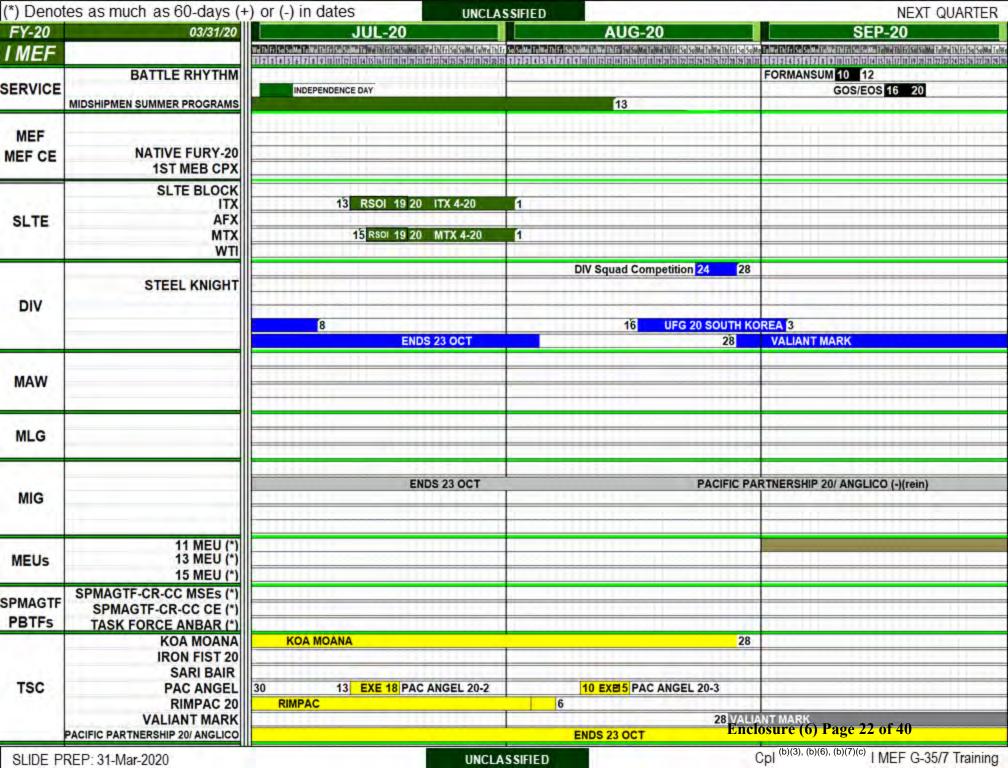


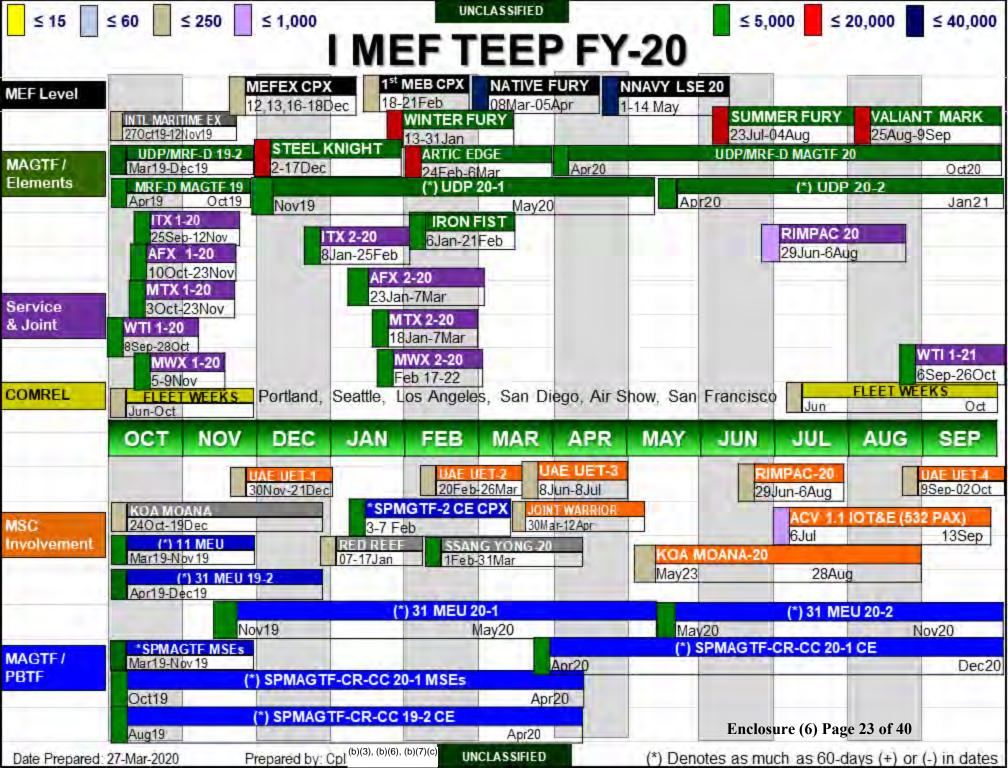


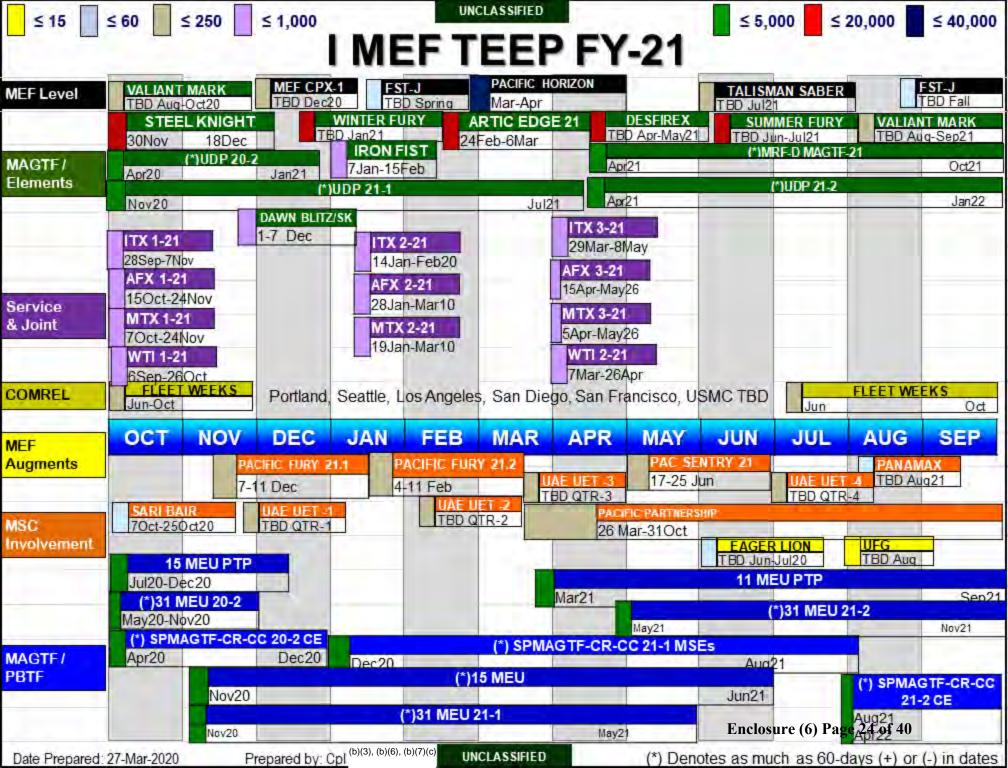


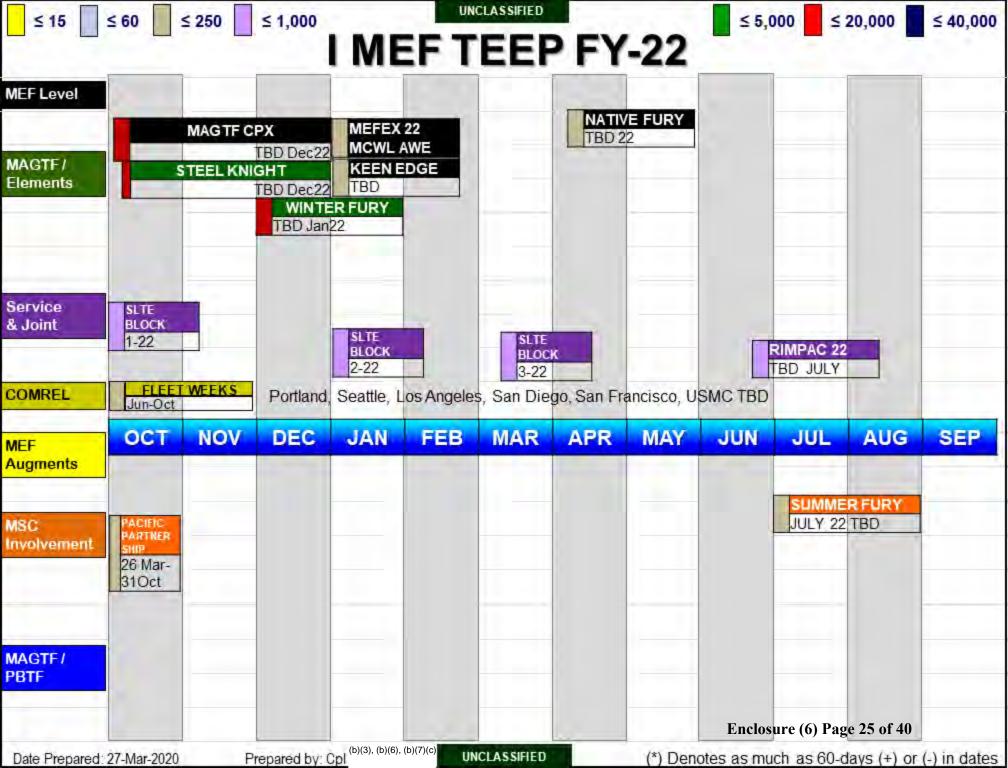


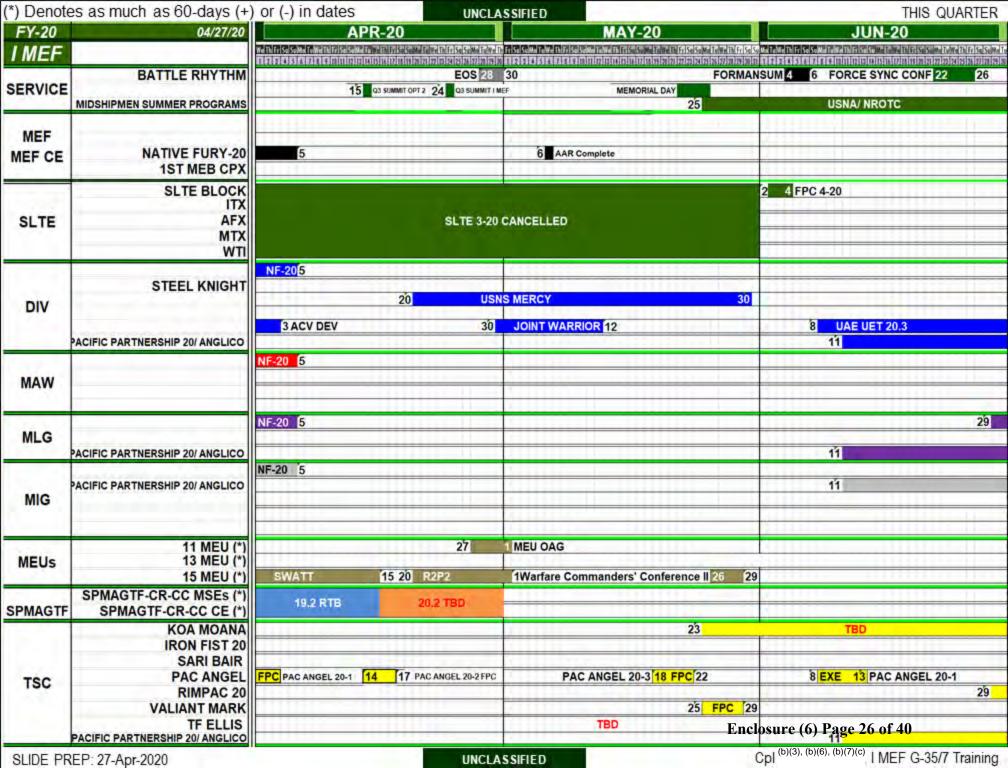


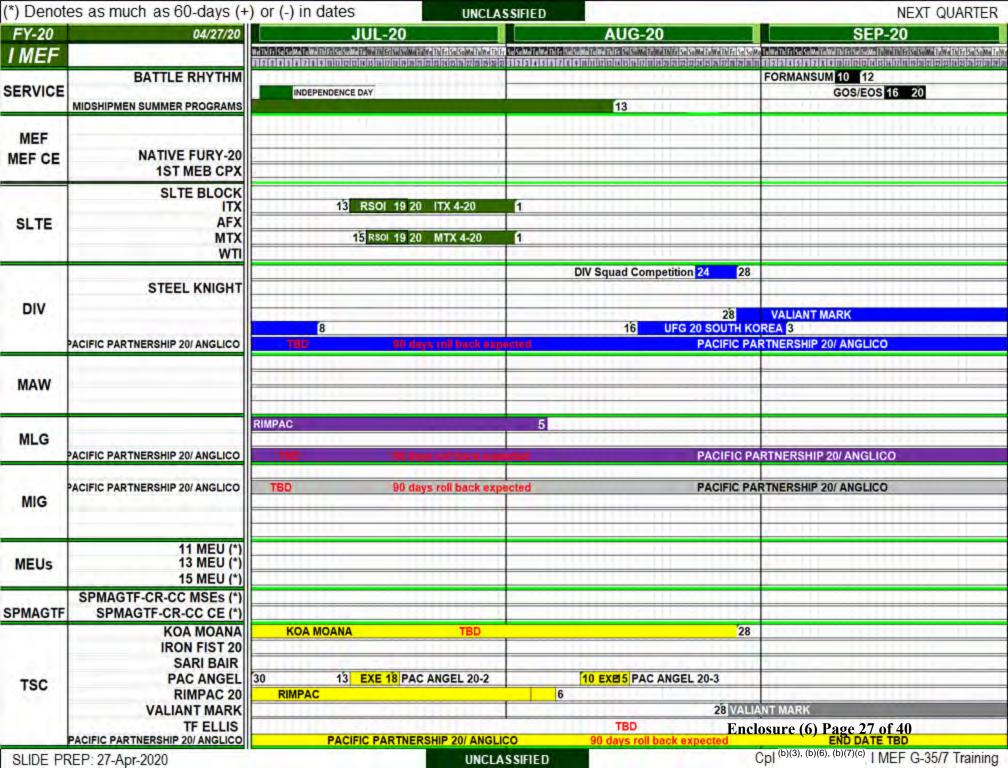


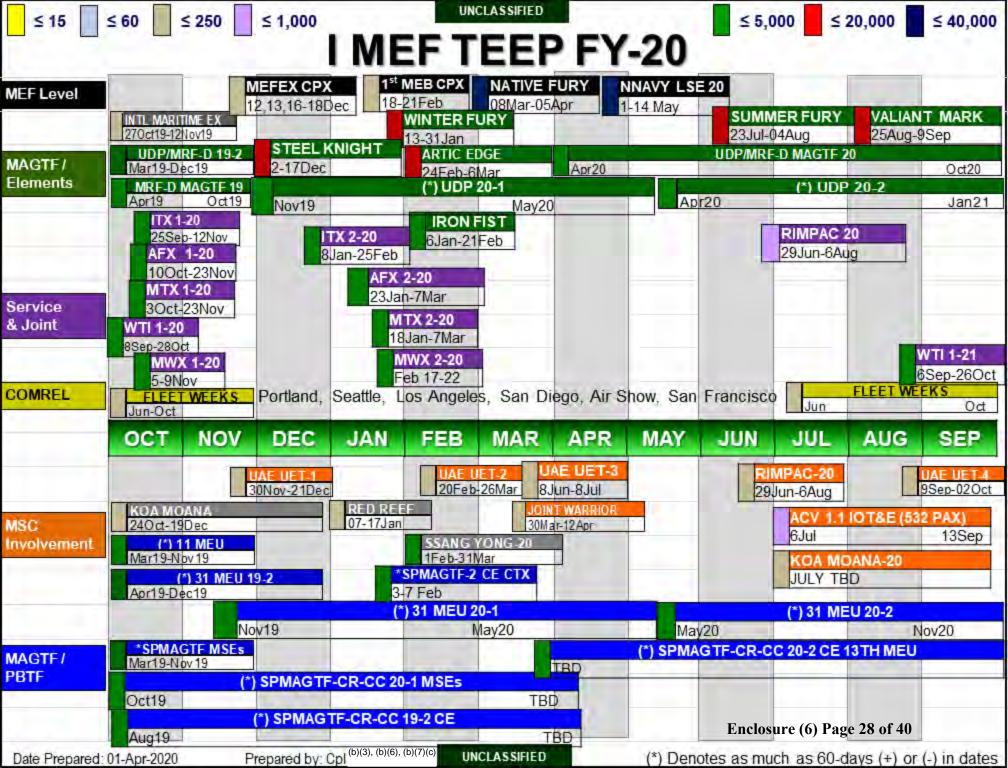


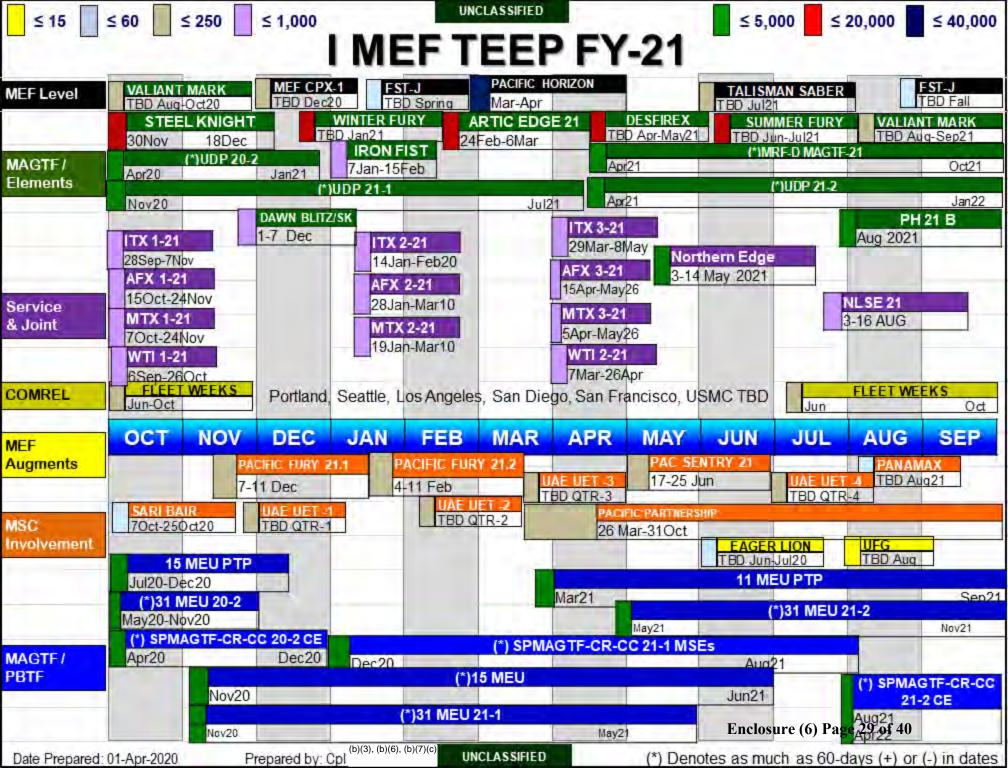


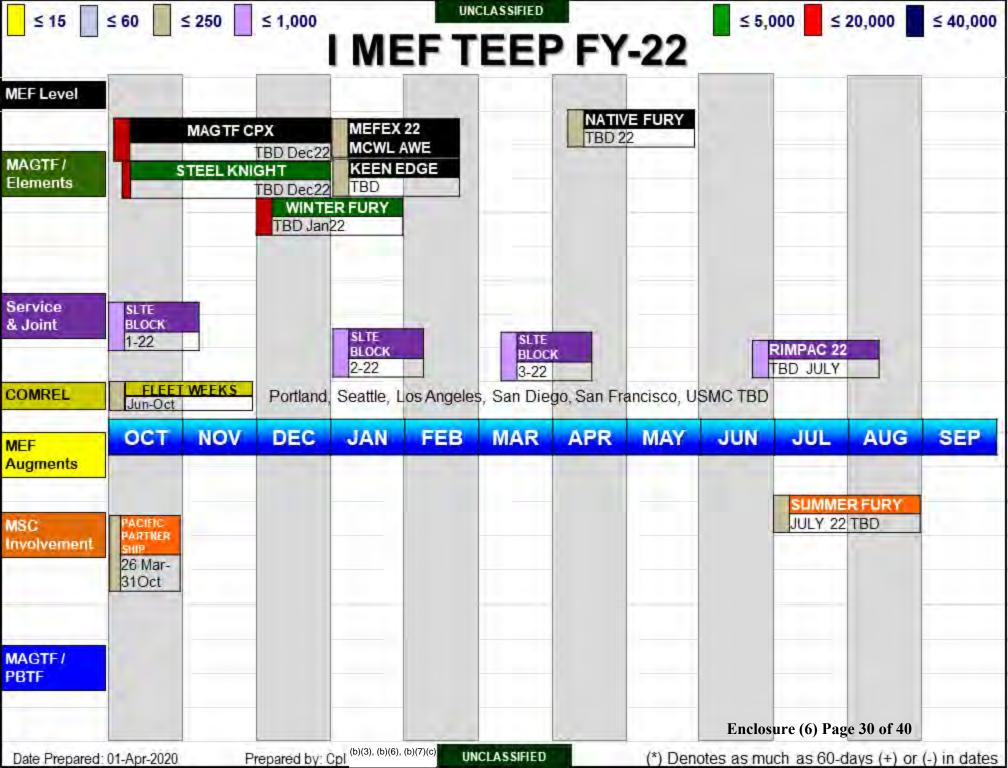


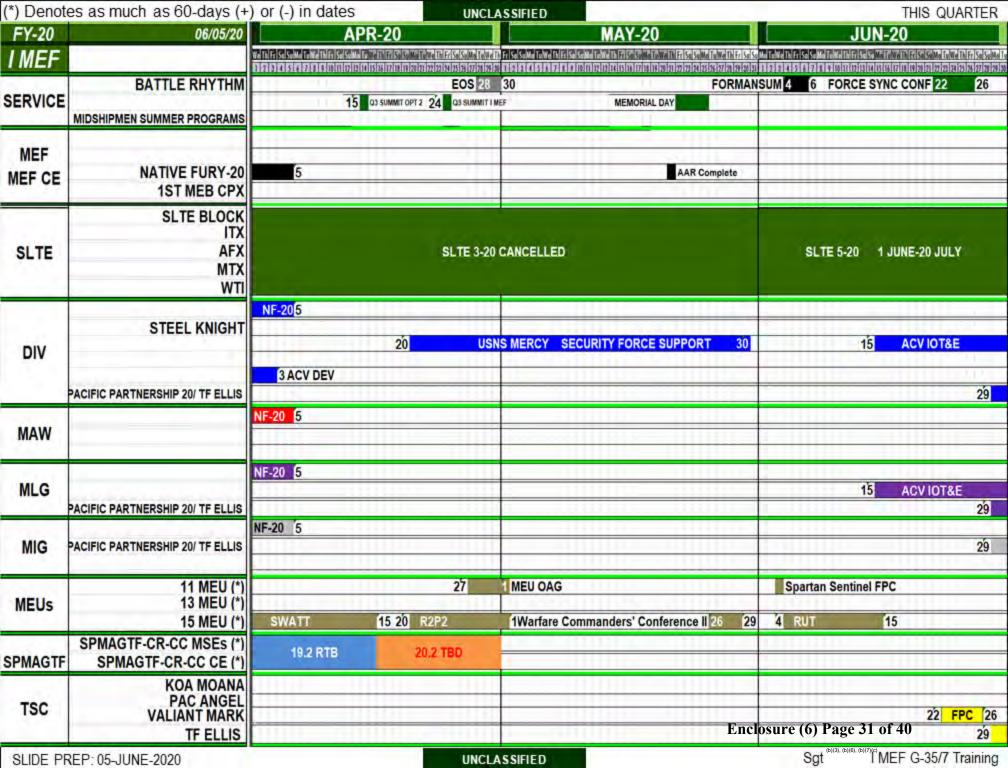


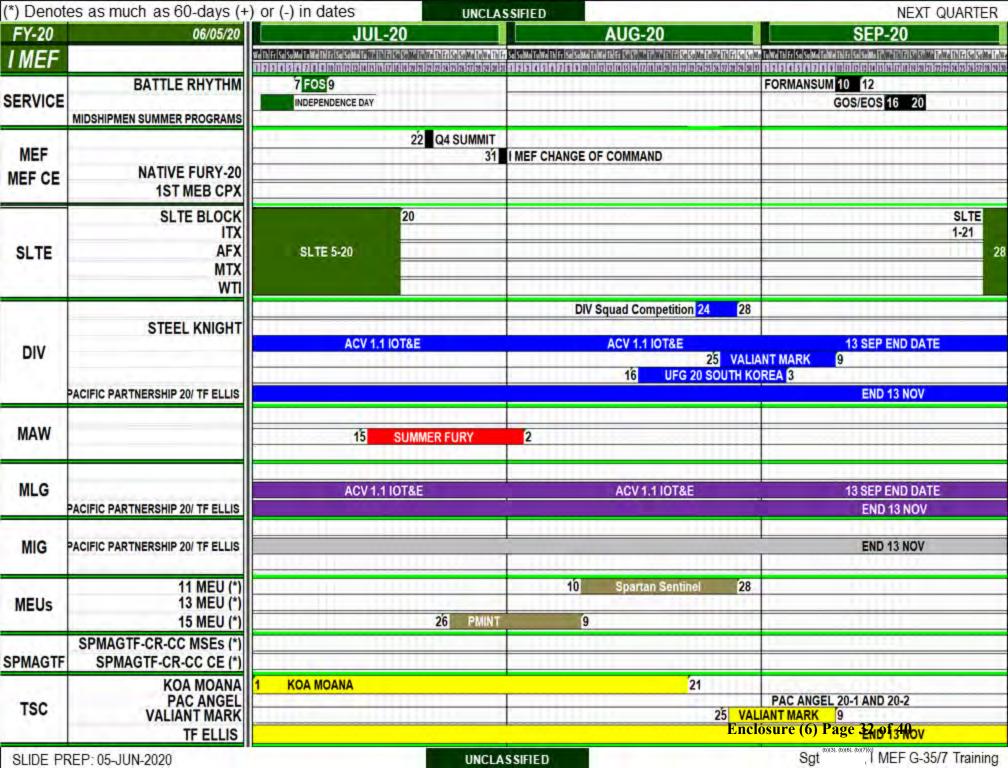


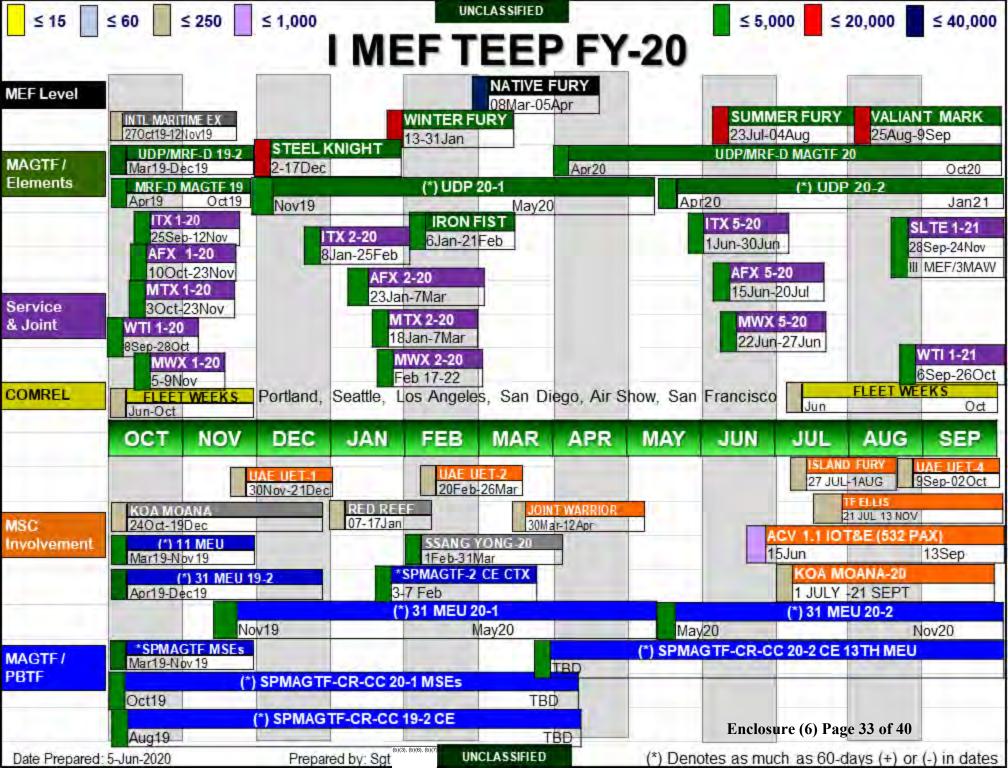


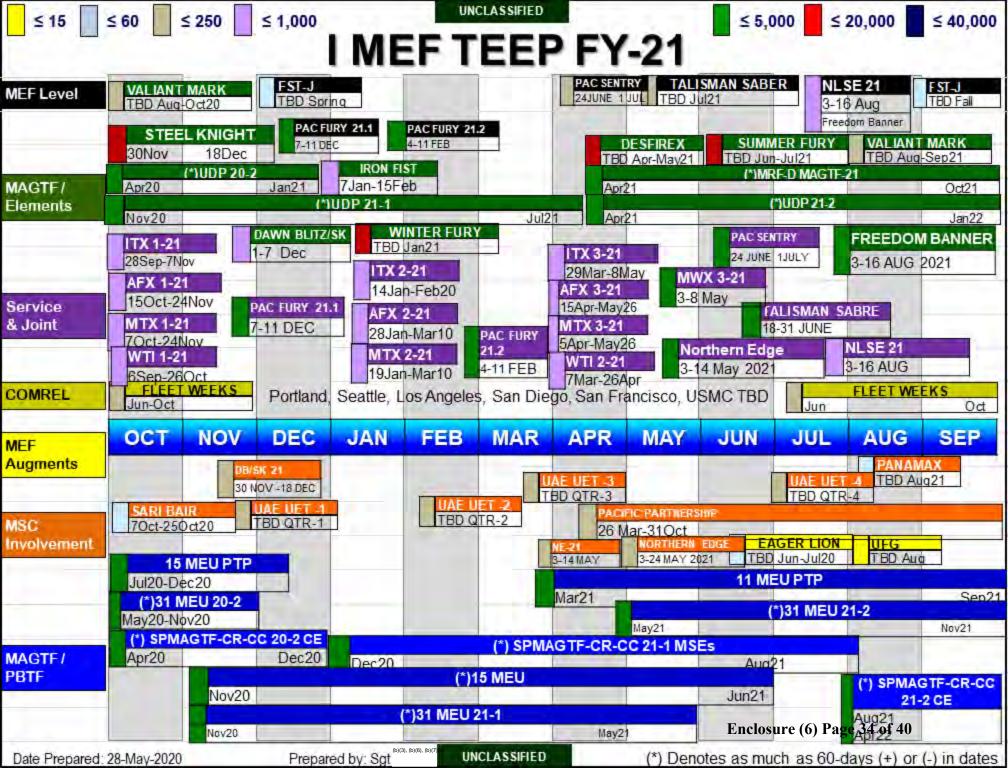


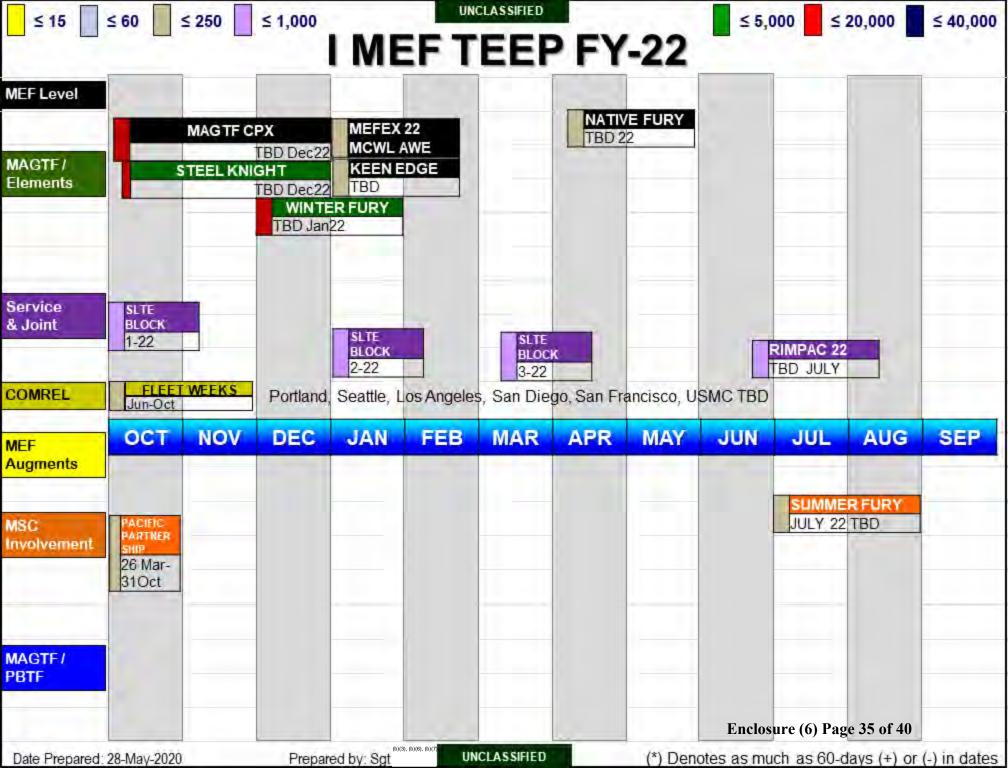


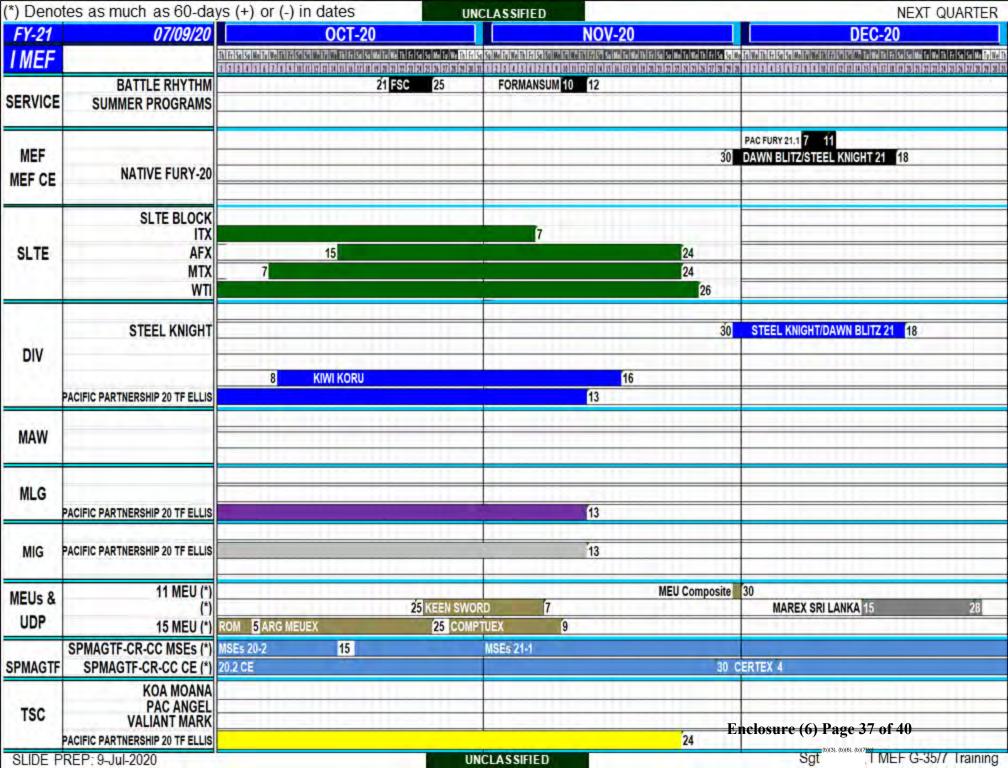


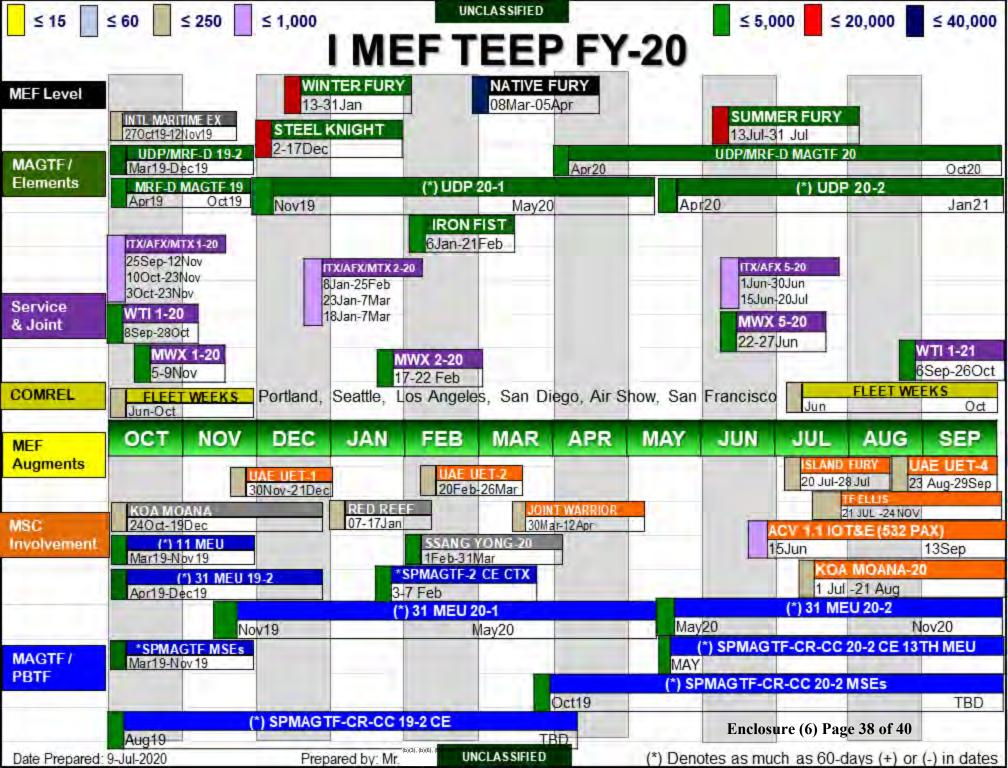


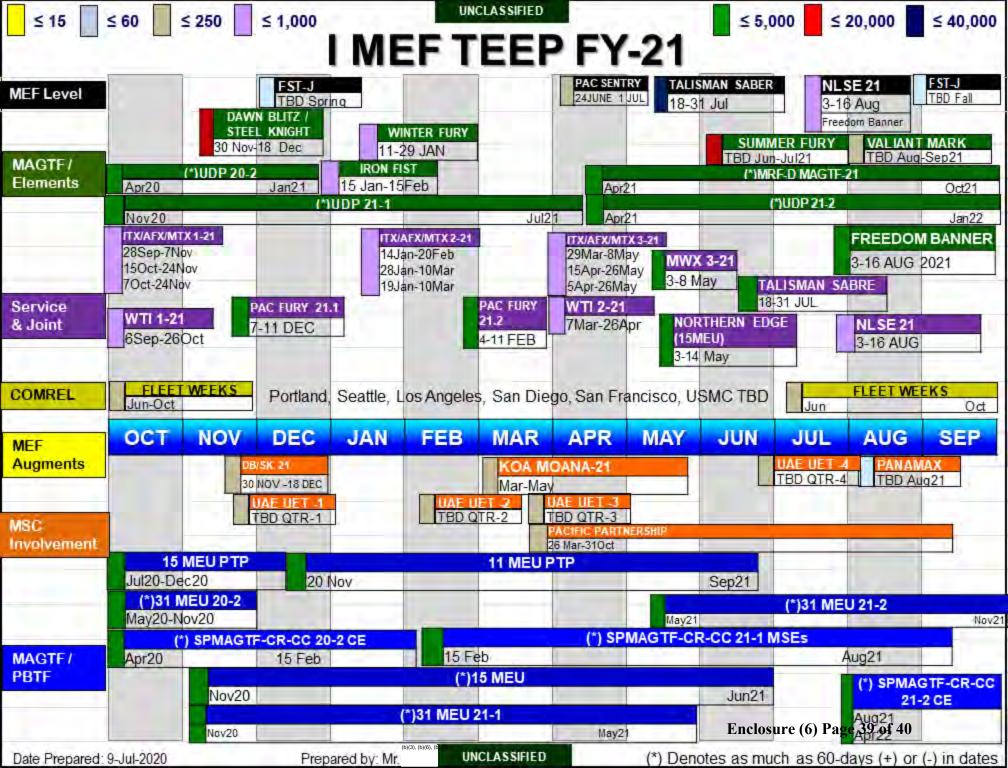


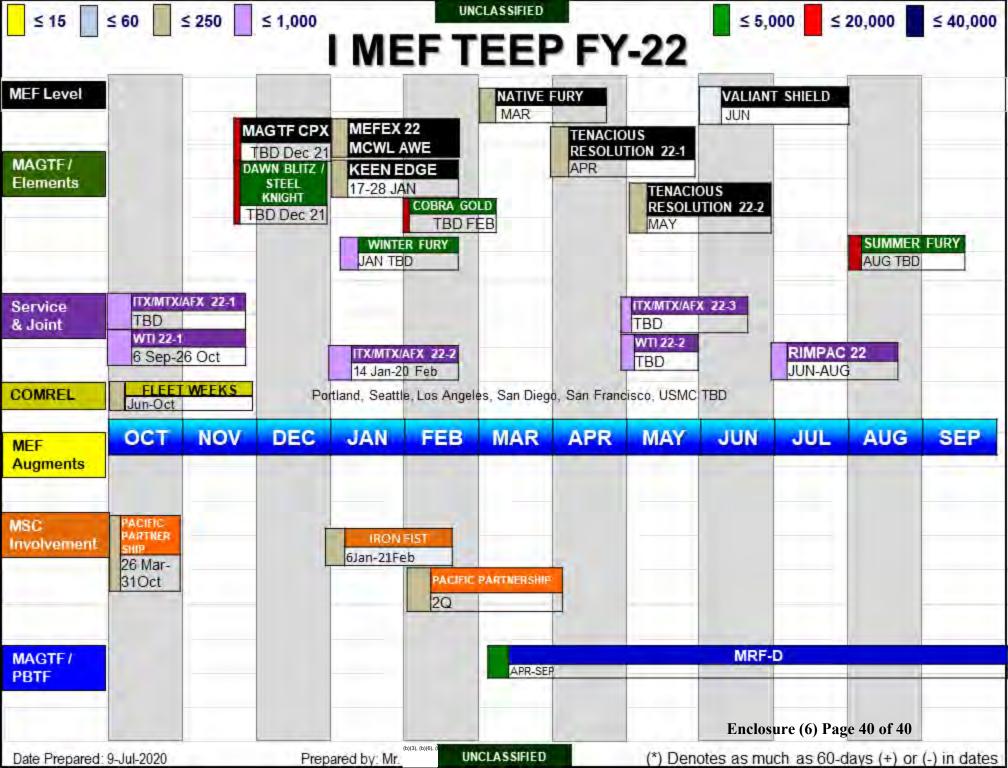












# CAMPAIGN PLAN





LOE #1: Deploy & Fight the Division. LOE #2: Generate, Deploy & Redeploy Forces. LOE #3 Readiness.

To better understand and characterize current and future threats to 1st Marine Division, reference the following resources: MCIA Future Operating Environment, MAGTF Operations in The Information Environment, National Intelligence Strategy 2019, & The National Defense Strategy Summary.

- 1 <a href="https://intelshare.intelink.gov/sites/mciakm/Ext/products/dird/mcia\_foe\_2016\_update.pdf">https://intelshare.intelink.gov/sites/mciakm/Ext/products/dird/mcia\_foe\_2016\_update.pdf</a>, 10-12.
- 2 <a href="https://intelshare.intelink.gov/sites/mciakm/Ext/products/dird/FOE%20IE%202019%20UNCLASS">https://intelshare.intelink.gov/sites/mciakm/Ext/products/dird/FOE%20IE%202019%20UNCLASS</a>. PDF, 13.

### b. Friendly

The Ready Mindset: Meeting our readiness challenge begins with our mindset and will to make good training happen. The issue of "will" speaks for itself—every leader at every level must be committed. Our mindset must be one of reducing the dissimilarity between the way we do things in combat and the way we do things in training. Assume it is our last week of peace. We must make an effort then to ensure that the habits we maintain in training support our wartime requirements. Our language, our standards of discipline, our planning processes—all that we do—must be consistent. Our deployment in time of crisis must be a smooth transition from our garrison posture—not a change in cardinal direction. Every resource investment, sourcing action, training event and exercise must be viewed in terms of potential readiness gain; if the event or action does not sustain or improve readiness, we must reconsider the investment of our people, equipment, money, and time.

The Combat Ready Bench. The Division cannot afford cyclical readiness. 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. As such, 1st Marine Division, in harmony with higher, will work to flatten the spikes—aka, reduce the inbound and outbound surges in the traditional staffing model. There are decades of inertia behind the existing manpower model. Expect friction; fight through it. Boldly ask for support. Lean into collaborating. This is a Division effort. Will the manning spikes ever be totally flat? No. Yet, to be America's premier crisis response force, Blue Diamond must have a combat ready bench—always. Finally, to optimize the performance of the Marines and Sailors on the bench—and be faithful to them—our staffing must be predictable.

Innovation. The character of war in the 21st century has changed, and if we fail to keep pace with the speed of war, we will lose the ability to compete. Underpinning our ability is adaptive and creative Marines, Sailors and leaders. Our Corps needs them to anticipate change, recognize opportunity, and adapt to meet new challenges. It is relying on the FMF to inspire innovation and adapt to meet new challenges.

## Encl (8) I MEF Q2 Summit, 17 January 2020

The above-referenced enclosure is classified SECRET//NOFORN and is available by contacting Judge Advocate Division.

## Encl (9) I MEF Q3 Summit, 24 April 2020

The above-referenced enclosure is classified SECRET//NOFORN and is available by contacting Judge Advocate Division.

## Encl (10) I MEF Q4 Summit, 22 July 2020

The above-referenced enclosure is classified SECRET//NOFORN and is available by contacting Judge Advocate Division.

[The investigative interview commenced on 0941, 23 April 2021.]

[WIT: LtGen J. Osterman]

[IO: LtGen C. Mundy]

[CR: Corporal (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) ]

LtGen Mundy: This is Lieutenant General Mundy. I'm interviewing Lieutenant General Jody Osterman, U.S. Marine Corps retired. It's 23 April 2021. So, Jody, I just showed you the appointing order. You're aware that the Assistant Commandant appointed me to conduct a command investigation into the facts and circumstances surrounding the forming and compositing of the 15th MEU associated with an AAV mishap that occurred off the San Clemente Island on 30 July 2020.

As a scene setter and to kind of help refresh your memory, I want to kind of give you some of the context as we've been able to determine. And, of course, you'll have a better appreciation and a more acute appreciation for what was going on. And that will certainly come up in some of the questions that we talk about here going forward. But for context, the months leading up to this incident reflect typical life in the fleet Marine force and the operating forces it was very busy, you know, high op tempo, as well as extraordinary events such as COVID-19 and other factors. And so I acknowledge the demand on staff bandwidth and on leadership oversight.

Just to jog your memory, the environment and early 2020, here are the few efforts that we've been able to identify

thus far. They would have included planning for contingency responses to the Qasem Soleimani strike in January 2020; support to the special purpose MAGTF; customs and border protection mission, tasks force Southwest, I believe it was called security for support to the USNS Mercy; participation and Exercise Iron Fist with the Japanese Ground Self-defense Force; support to newly established COVID quarantine facilities for deploying redeploying units; preparation for exercise Native Fury; cancellation of WTI; modifications to ITX 2-20; modification and subsequent revamped realistic urban training, this is specific to 15th MEU later on in their PTP; support to recruit training quarantine requirements at MCRD San Diego; the regular or force generation requirements in support of INDOPACOM and U.S. Central Command, which would have included saucing forces for Marine rotational force Darwin, Special Purpose MAGTF Crisis Response Central Command; and the Unit Deployment Program; as well as compression of the ARG MUE workups from 15th MEU from three to two at sea periods; as well as all the precautions and just the dynamic responses to the policy environment related to COVID-19. There were also force design issues taking place, divestitures, stand up of new units, and even organizational changes. Specifically to the 15th MEU, we were trying to evolve it,  $\scriptstyle\rm I$ think toward MEU 2030 or the future MEU. And then, of course, you had your change of command to deal with during this time frame as well.

So with that, as a scene setter, as a backdrop to refresh your memory -- I know there was a lot more going on than that. But those are just some of the topical ones. I'm just going to start with the first question here. Near the end of 2019 and in the first months of 2020, what types of challenges did I MEF and your MSC's face?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): Before I start to answer some of the questions here with the official record here. I'd like to first say is that not a day goes by that I don't think about the Marines and sailors lost in this mishap. As tragic and as I mentioned right after the mishap, my heartfelt condolences go out to their family and to their friends. And obviously work to answer the questions as best as I can today.

But they are associated with events over a year ago. I frankly retired about six months ago. So I haven't had any access to my Marine Corps e-mails, files, calendar events, anything associated with that timeframe, you know, for point of reference. And as you mentioned, just showed me the appointing order here as we started to talk but the -- I appreciate you giving me that FOIA copy. But to be honest with you, I've only had an opportunity to kind of skim over the colonel level investigation here because of work requirements I've had. And just a couple hours here and there kind of thing to hearing after before we talk. So anyway, I just want to -- so long as that

context is understood, there.

You've captured a lot of it there. You know, the challenges that the MEF and the MSC's face there towards 2019 for six months at 2020. There were numerous challenges ranging from fiscal constraints to operational tempo, to COVID mitigation, included transition of the F-18 and harrier operations to F-35 squadron capability. OP tempo is extremely high trying to get many of the MEF units from a 2.0 or less deployment to dwell, to at least a 2.5. You mentioned already a number of these, but fulfilling unplanned operational missions on short notice, such as Alaska deployments, the border patrol augmentation that you mentioned with Task Force Southwest, which the end date kept being advanced later and later, in terms of unknown end states. Fulfillment of the global force mission, such as the UDP, Special MAGTF Central Command, the MRF D MEU deployments. We also had theater engagement deployments like task force called Koa Muwana and Task Force Elvis, which were working with PACOM there in that AO.

The COVID related force generation such as hospital augmentation at Camp Pendleton Hospital. I mean, that one really can't be understated. That was literally an entire MLG effort to establish almost a field hospital capability for maximizing ICU wards.

LtGen Mundy: This is the MIOC I think?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): Well, no. This was actually at

the Camp Pendleton Hospital. We set up dunnage and everything to expand there -- in other words, to take the -- what they had from ICU capability and then recovery capability to expand all of that to ICU capability and then we established the MLG dunnage outside, which then surged or medical capability there. So I don't remember how many beds it was, but it was over 100 that were that had oxygen and everything else, full medical capability.

LtGen Mundy: I remember Brigadier General Shea talking about that. I think was 250 beds. And you didn't know how much how severe the COVID, you know, we all thought it was, you know.

LtGen Osterman (Ret): We didn't know how it would happen and we expected the possibility of having to surge to help the civilian community. So did that. You mentioned security forces for the Mercy, the augmentation for MCRD San Diego to assist them in quarantine procedures for their COVID patients. We sent Marines down to assist with that. And then the MIOC, as you describe, to handle our isolation cases, the ITX, WTI cancellation, SLS, etc. had to really push hard with that in the policies to try and reinstate those training opportunities. And that took time over multiple rotations.

We also helped TECOM with the RS O&I, their Marines and the entry training pipeline. So a lot of my G-4 section was

associated with that and trying to create the clean bubble across the country as Train and Education Command tried to get the Marines into some of the courses out west there. So anyway, I guess to capture all of that, in March of 2020 alone, the operational employment recovery of forces involved approximately 12000 members of I MEF moving around the globe under COVID constraints and restraints. So that gives a snapshot of just the scope scale how busy it was.

LtGen Mundy: So looking back at it now, how would you characterize this looking across the expanse of your career, busier than normal, about the same? You know, obviously, it wasn't less busy, but what I'm trying to get to here is in terms of, you know, staff bandwidth or leadership bandwidth. How would you just characterize it?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): I would say it was the highest tempo that I had, save for combat operations in Afghanistan. And frankly, I put the MEF staff on essentially a wartime battle rhythm footing. We stood up our command and control apparatus and our staff planning apparatus under B2C2WG construct to really do the daily work -- because we were having policy changes sometimes multiple times a week coming from, you know, DoD and headquarters Marine Corps.

So the constraints and restraints were constantly changing, as were the assumptions. And it required, you know,

like in a combat environment, the constant iteration of the staff to adjust training, material readiness efforts, all those things. So the tempo was very high.

LtGen Mundy: Yeah. So I was going to -- you kind of wove in that. The next question there about COVID. going to ask you to characterize the impact of COVID on the MEF. I think you've already touched on that, unless you have anything specific to material readiness and training readiness. But  $\frac{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)}{(7)(c)}$  -- just also one quick specific question on that. You jogged my memory when you mentioned (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) that. stated that he worked seven days a week from January through April or there were some period of time during this timeframe, the forming and compositing period. You know, seven days a week and that was brought on not only by all of the activities that you mentioned, but by the requirements, you know, from responding to these plethora of COVID memos and higher level quidance that received. Any thoughts on that?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): That's a correct statement. We were, as I mentioned, pretty much on a just as if we were in combat the seven day a week thing. I guess, you know, to -- along those lines with training and whatnot. Just to give an example, you know, at the unit level, the initial ROM requirements and policies that came down were that if you had a Marine or sailor become positive, you know, their

entire section was essentially shut down. And so, you know, we would have entire functional areas that would go -- have to go into two weeks of ROM and therefore that functional area shut down. So, for example, within the wing, there was -- trying to remember exactly. I think it was a essentially material management function if I recall correctly. But that entire shop had to shut down and we had to bring external people in to try and just maintain the function for the wing.

The one that is probably more specific is in terms of mitigation or to give an idea of the adaptation required or the changes within the wing. We had one instance where COVID positive cases shut down an entire squadron maintenance capability. And so we ended up having to go to essentially a day and a night shift. And it wasn't because we were trying to do 24 hour ops, it was that we had to segregate the maintenance capability so that if we had a COVID positive case in that section, only one-half of the maintenance capability would be lost for two weeks.

But that was just indicative of the adjustments to the impacts of policies. The Marines were not getting overly sick or anything personally, but the policies coming down stated that if we had a COVID case, everybody that had contact had to go into ROM for two weeks, which then had readiness implications.

LtGen Mundy: Ripple effects across the readiness. And

I'm kind of hanging on this because -- the COVID issue, because some feedback and I got from General Savage, for example, and the impact of different approaches to COVID. And here I'm talking bluegreen or Navy and Marine. Was that -- do you recall any specifics on that? Was that a challenge in terms of -- I guess I'm skipping ahead now to the MEU in particular. But I know that has been mentioned a couple of times as a challenge that we have one policy here, but then there's an absolute zero tolerance for, you know, Marines and sailors going aboard ship. Any thoughts on that or recollection?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): The Navy took a zero tolerance policy, and I guess I'd best describe it as a clean bubble concept. Important to all of this even though it wasn't a Marine function, it was the Theodore Roosevelt who was going on during all this. So it tempered a lot of those things, you know, policy decisions, everything else within department of the Navy. But it did have an impact because of the ability to get Marines on and off the ship, because of the clean bubble concept. We also, for example, were unable to remove equipment once it had been declared clean in order to -- in between the sea periods. So the maintenance issues, things like that, became exacerbated in terms of physical access. The ability to get Marines on the

ship because of requirements to establish their, you know, being clean. This also ties into the availability of testing at that point.

LtGen Mundy: That's right. And we weren't --

LtGen Osterman (Ret): It wasn't prevalent. And they couldn't get the testing. So the only way to do it was to ROM Marines before we're getting on. And, you know, not necessarily getting off, but that clean bubble concept of the Navy made a difference.

LtGen Mundy: I had forgotten about that -- it's a great point, lack of testing. It's a good recollection there. So let's -- I think we cover COVID and some of the challenges you faced. I want to move on now and just ask, from your perch as the MEF commander, how you communicated your priorities and thinking on how to mitigate risks, and related to this, any thoughts you might have about how you prioritized, for example, the Soleimani 1422? I think you all recall it 1022, the older version of it. And GFM readiness, the constant need to get forces out the door for various deployments.

LtGen Osterman (Ret): From a priority perspective, the real world crisis response capabilities took priority. So I canceled the MEF X to accommodate the Soleimani situation because we just couldn't get them out the door and the time that Native Fury, we just couldn't get the MEF X scenario

planning thing going, as well as, the real world requirements. So I had to make a decision to prioritize that. But generally I prioritized GFM requirements first, then General OPLAN readiness, and then routine training. So that's kind of how it went.

Really, as far as the -- as we described already, the COVID policy direction changed frequently, sometimes with even within the same week. I usually communicated my priorities and thinking during a weekly VTC with my MSC and MEF subordinate commanders. The primary staff -- and I also rolled in MCI-West, MCAGCC and MCRD into that forum. So we had that once a week, you know, with the other stations, as it were available.

But as I talked about, we put the MEF into an operational battle rhythm to get after the staff planning requirements and then making sure that not only do we have full staff planning, but then we had the decision making optimized because we had everybody's involvement. We had good staff action associated with it and then, you know, being able to adjust to those external factors that were coming. But I did, you know, I guess just to give an example of guidance, risk mitigation, things like that. For example, one of the things that I conveyed in those forums was the fact that as we had to accommodate these — the COVID as was all these other external factors that came into play is that told the staff and the subordinate commanders that I was willing to go to the COCOM or the supported

commanders basically from force generating forces for to tell them, for example, like if a unit was going out and had a set of METL that it was supposed to meet, that I had no problem going to that higher command and telling them that we would provide the GFM support as required, but they would not be qualified in X, Y or Z. Because, you know, we couldn't safely do the training or we couldn't completely do the training to standard or whatever. I didn't want the subordinate commanders to feel pressure that —to try and accomplish impossible tasks. And so that was, I guess, an example of the guidance and in terms of trying to accommodate the situation and risk mitigation factors.

LtGen Mundy: Yeah, that's great. And one of the ideas that has percolated is, as we've looked into this, is this idea of task saturation. And so that's a great point that you made about -- I started to ask actually whether you felt like you could push back against some of these, you know, if not higher level requirements -- internal Marine Corps requirements that, you know, it doesn't appear to me that anything I mentioned up front were things that you could have said no to, for example. But another way to do it might have been to say, well, we can still provide a force, but it's just not going to be able to do all these things because we've had to slow down to deal with the COVID environment and those sorts or the material readiness is not where it would be under ordinary circumstances.

LtGen Osterman (Ret): Exactly. And even things like the southwest border mission pushing back on how it was to be accomplished, you know, I needed to be -- in order to be able to maintain global force management, OPLAN readiness, and everything else manpower wise, had to be able to rotate forces in and out of there at a faster cycle than what the NORTHCOM commander wanted. So they wanted him there. You don't like a normal six month deployment kind of thing. But I told them, no. We're rotate battalions in and out of there because we had to meet all these other requirements. And so that's just one example also of not necessarily a MET they weren't meeting, but that concept of employment modification as well.

LtGen Mundy: Okay. Good. And so, again, to kind of moving on from there, what were some of the I MEFF staff processes that you used to help maintain situational awareness of material readiness? And here I'm thinking -- again, I got kind of alerted to this by talking to Tom Savage yesterday, two days ago, actually. You know, I think it was a MEF -- so you did quarterly MEF summits or force preservation boards and maybe I'm confusing the two, but they linked together somehow.

LtGen Osterman (Ret): We do one in the morning and one in the afternoon. So usually it was the MEF summit and then the force preservation roughly the same group of people but

more force preservation focused in the afternoon.

LtGen Mundy: And so were those -- did they give you a good sense of, you know, the readiness and the MSC's commanders were able to provide the qualitative and sometimes quantitative feedback to you on, you know, here's where we are. And you were able to give guidance and set priorities and that sort of thing.

LtGen Osterman (Ret): They did. And we provided the template that, you know, of things that we wanted to have presented so that it wasn't just what they wanted to present. That we also had other forms besides those periodic material readiness meetings that I sat in on my G-4, MEF supply officer, et cetera, provided. And they would highlight across the MEF certain readiness — material readiness issues that we had across the board, it helped keep me up. And then the other one that I relied on and which is obviously prescribed was the DRRS briefings that I received. They went in obviously per the DRRS format, into a lot of the detail associated with readiness and equipment and personnel and training readiness.

LtGen Mundy: And just related to that, were you aware of any overrides by subordinate commanders using the, the ability to say it's say, by the numbers a C-3, but really I'm C-2?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): There were some overrides. I

mean, the only one that I remember specifically was the things like when the Marine Corps changed the table of equipment with the M-27 rifle, you know, the squad automatic rifle that came into play. The feeling of equipment didn't match the change in TE. So from a readiness perspective, we still had Marines still had their M-4. They just hadn't gotten their M-27. So what would normally be a degradation in equipment readiness reporting, you know, there's commanders override there to say that we still have the influence, we can still do the mission we just haven't gotten the M-27.

So there's a mismatch in the -- just in terms of the equipment identification, not the capability, if that makes sense.

LtGen Mundy: Okay. So moving on to focusing on MEU's in particular and the 15th MEU, how did you handle oversight of the MEU's? And in particular, did you assign your deputy or some other officer in providing principal oversight in the forming and compositing of 15th MEU?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): Basically the oversight, you know, normal command oversight of the units, as it always is across the board. I also had you EOTG, which was the training function associated with that. So for 15th MEU in particular, we continued to use the same oversight

mechanisms that we did with all the previous MEU's as well that had been prescribed. I did not only with the MEU function, but just more broadly. I used Brigadier General Savage, my deputy, to be the -- an extension of me, if you will. Because obviously 53,000 Marines and sailors and all of those units that are associated with that, the scope and breadth in the MEF is well beyond what one person can do. So I used him just to assist me in that process.

LtGen Mundy: Okay. And actually, I'm going to skip ahead then on that note to one of the latter questions, I think. It regards 1st Marine Division and the lack of an assistant Division commander, did -- was that a concern for you? And did you sense that, you know, as the I MEF is the largest MEF in the Marine Corps, 1st Marine Division is the largest division in the Marine Corps. Any thoughts on that?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): General Castellvi and I had some discussion about that. It was I had a concern because we didn't have an ADC assigned. But when he and I discussed it, he felt as though it was mitigated -- he had a very strong chief of staff who had been there as well. And so he felt as though he had some covers there. When this March, March or April, whenever the general officer assignments came out, you know, I noticed that we were once again not going to be assigned an ADC, a general officer. So as I looked further down the road, knowing that the chief of

staff -- the incoming chief of staff, was going to be retiring, knowing that General Castellvi was going to rotate out, I wasn't comfortable with that.

So I pressed headquarters Marine Corps for a colonel over staff. And then what I did was work to assign my outgoing chief of staff, to be the ADC at the Division because I felt -- General Turner was inbound and I just felt that given the manpower changes in there, we needed to have an ADC in some way. Same thing happened with the AWC at the wing, because that was gaffed as well. And General Iiams, with my concurrence, took one of his post MAG commanders and positioned him as the AWC.

LtGen Mundy: Right. Okay. I bounced around a little bit. I wanted to get that out. Since you were talking about the, you know, the span of control, I think that's certainly something that we needed to talk about there. And I may come back to it later on. But back to the oversight of the MEU's Oand you mentioned EOTG. I think I MEF G-7 and EOTG are combined, right?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): Correct.

LtGen Mundy: And it was (b)(3),(b)(6),(b)(7)(c)

And so -- how did you assess I MEF EOTG role and performance in preparing units for MEU's, and in particular the 15th MEU?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): My observation was that they did

an excellent job. Colonel (e) was a post MEU commander. So he knew it very well. Had several iterations under his belt before the 15th MEU evolution, so very successful.

And both 13th MEU and 11th MEU training regiments. And he briefed every week at my weekly staff meeting on what the status was and how things were coming along. And then was very forthright about coming forward when they were -- when his view of the trajectory of the training program was on track, off track, needed modification or needed support kind of thing. He was very forthright.

LtGen Mundy: And so with that in mind, I'm going to go question nine on the questions that I sent you to talk a little bit about because I know EOTG plays a heavy role, of course. And I think, you know, and they have some hand in all of the in helping you and all of the at sea periods. But in particular, I'm focused on PMINT. Of course, this is when the mishap occurred and, you know, what, if any challenges you might have been made aware of either from the (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) G-7, EOTG, from related to the 15th MEU's PMINT or Tom Savage and whether or not, you know, saw that PMINT schedule, that 15th MEU executed as being in line with previous MEU's. Really, was it an aggressive schedule, was it about the same as every other schedule or just how did you see that? And I guess we actually -- maybe I should start -- PMINT, you were there for the PMINT brief, I

believe, or was that a brief to Tom Savage?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): I don't recall. I mentioned before that I don't have access to my notes and emails and all that. A lot of this stuff especially in place in time in which you and all that kind of stuff. I honestly can't remember. Some of the challenges I think with that one were we talked about a little bit already. But, you know, the various ship policies related to COVID trying to get all of that put together. So in other words, it wasn't just a -there wasn't a universal Navy policy. Each ship was also different. And so I do remember, you know, those policies related to embarking the ships, the mitigation requirements, who had how many COVID positives at any given point time, all that. Obviously, then coupled with the schedule changes the clean bubble concept that we talked about, some of the ship's maintenance issues, I do remember kind of an aggregate of that, just creating an unusually large amount of friction. And EOTG was deeply involved, obviously, in trying to make sure that could be all orchestrated. But as you pointed out, you know, even shifts into two versus a three at sea period type concept.

I remember looking at the various courses of action of how to compress and deal and accommodate all of that. Just being very disruptive and requiring very deliberate close planning to mitigate it.

LtGen Mundy: How would you describe the command relationship between you and in particular in the Division commander and the MEF staff and 1st Marine Division?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): I'd describe it as very positive and collaborative. It -- to be honest with you, throughout my tenure there I looked for points of friction because, you know, classic higher headquarters being disruptive to subordinate units is kind of routine. But to be honest with you, the -- everybody kind of looked at me, like, what are you talking about. It was a very positive relationship.

From what I saw. There were some friction factors but I would say it was well below even what the norm was for two headquarters at that the scope and scale and relationship.

Personally, General Castellvi and I got along fine. There were no issues here.

LtGen Mundy: Did General Castellvi ever discuss specific leadership concerns again, such as lack of ADC or the absence of the 1st Marine CO Colonel? I know colonel (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , of course, was

gone to Native Fury supporting me over in the Middle East.

You know, were you aware of the leadership gaps here,

specifically down at the smaller unit level?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): General Castellvi and I talked Colonel  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}$  and we -- to include the timing of his change of command, the competence of

leadership during his (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)

participation in Native Fury, etc. General Castellvi presented a solid mitigation plan that I thought was sound.

Relatively to Native Fury, I was more concerned about

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

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

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

But that was

all fine.

1st Marines were the ones that were supposed to be taking care of the MPF operations, which is why they were in the mix there of being involved in Native Fury. So anyway, I was unaware of any leadership gaps occurring in the discussion.

General Castellvi was confident that solid leadership was in place. And, you know, basically didn't have any reports to the contrary.

LtGen Mundy: Yeah, it's really the point where I think I'm driving at is here that the oversight of 1/4 as it became BLT 1/4,  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}$  or

gone for an extensive period of time, I think, right?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): But to be honest with you, one of the changes I made when I came aboard was that typically the regimental headquarters routinely were the nucleus of the Special Purpose MAGTF deployments. So, you know, what had happened for years and years was no regimental headquarters were there for this force generation efforts.

So in this case, for the limited duration that they were over, for Native Fury, it was very minimal compared to what had been done previously.

LtGen Mundy: Good point.

LtGen Osterman (Ret): I took the regimental headquarters off of that mission and went to a purpose built headquarters, as you and I talked about before, just to reinforce that need for the force generation capability that is regimental headquarters. So they'd had a pretty good running start, you know, in terms of continuity of regiments being back prior to and Native Fury.

LtGen Mundy: Okay. Did General Castellvi provide you with updates on the inspection performance and training and material readiness related to independent battalions? I guess we should say regiments as well, but specifically we're driving toward 3rd AAV Battalion in this case?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): Really not beyond the normal DRRS reporting. And I wouldn't have expected him to do so unless there were some issues that required my attention.

LtGen Mundy: Were you aware of issues with 3rd AAV
Battalion, including trends that would emerge -- would have
emerged out of the battalion's command climate survey or
performance and inspections and including a FASMO. They had
several findings on FASMO and then later had an LRE in the

spring, I think that also indicated some challenges.

LtGen Osterman (Ret): I wasn't aware of those issues.

LtGen Mundy: Okay. So now we're moving toward -- and again, who was present for what brief's? I should have a better feel for that. But if you were aware of the E-211 brief on 13 April this is just prior, of course, to the 20 April compositing of the MEU. The 3rd AAV platoon was noted -- this was in the read ahead package as trained but not evaluated. And again, were you aware that neither Victor 1/4 nor the AAV platoon had completed required swim qualifications or underwater egress training prior to chop to the 15th MEU?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): I don't recall whether I was at the meeting or not.

LtGen Mundy: I think Tom Savage said he took it virtually because he was still on ROM. So I don't know if you were in on it or not.

LtGen Osterman (Ret): I don't recall. To be honest with you, I don't recall the swim or the UET shortfalls being brought to my attention.

LtGen Mundy: And then as it relates to training assessments, was it common or generally accepted that units provided to the MEU may not have been formally evaluated prior to their chop or their composite? And if it was, was it related any way to the burden of additional tasks and

## COVID requirements?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): What I routinely directed with those letters of instruction for the compositing was the units were to be evaluated prior to the chop, particularly the battalions and squadrons conducting a MCCRE. But I don't recall any exceptions being briefed to me in the case the 15th MEU.

LtGen Mundy: And so again, per the LOI, I think the instruction that you mentioned know what was I MEF's policy on units completing the Marine Corps Combat Readiness evaluation prior to composite?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): That battalions and squadrons would have to complete a MCCRE. The attachments and all of the smaller unit level aren't capable of conducting independent MCCRE's at that level. So they wherever possible, as they were — those units were coming on line trying to get the attachments to their, you know, in the case of a battalion landing team, trying to get him in there to be able to get an evaluation associated with the unit that they would be operating with was the desire. But obviously —

LtGen Mundy: It was tough to do.

LtGen Osterman (Ret): It was difficult to do because of the manpower forming training cycles, you know, compounded with things like the border missions and these

interim missions, if the units would have.

LtGen Mundy: So, yeah, just on that point, obviously, the unit -- you're aware now that the 3rd AAV battalion -- the platoon from 3rd AAV Battalion had not conducted any sort of formal assessment of a MCCRE or otherwise. And to your point they're just a platoon, I think company level and higher is typically at least what they, you know, the level of the MCCRE, if they're not doing it with the unit, that they're going to be attached to later on.

There was the battery had not conducted a MCCRE, but they did later during the PTP. I think that was one other anomaly. And then there were a couple of 3rd MAW det. The F-35 det and the VMU-1 det had not completed a MCCRE prior to the MEU composite.

So I asked Wolfie Iiams yesterday about, you know, was there a mechanism to try and get a formal assessment -- even if it wasn't a formal MCCRE, because you don't take an AAV platoon out and do a formal MCCRE. Was there anything in your mind that -- anything that you recollect about trying to ensure that these units got some sort of formal, you know, somebody with white hat grading you on your performance prior to deploying?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): I guess the effort, from my
perspective, was incumbent upon the MSC commanders. So in
other words, I was very concerned about aviation readiness
because we weren't sure where they were going with harriers

or F-35s for quite a while. And we had also gotten direction to chop aircraft to 1st Marine Air Wing, for example, the F-35 and cancellation of WTI. So a lot of these events that were built in, you know, for normal certification were obviated in this period because of COVID cancellations for ITX, WTI, all that. And they, you know -- if not directly, indirectly, that cascaded into some of the events.

So in the case of the wing, I know that they asked for even a delay in a chop day in order to try and get some of that scrutiny put on to the squadron to make things happen. I guess the ultimate part of it was that when we -- and not just with 15th MEU, but all the MEU's when we did the compositing brief or the confirmation brief on compositing, you know, my time test was I would ask the MEU commander, as well as, the MSC commanders, you know, are there any obstacles to providing the units for composite that, you know, are not going to be able to be overcome. And then that way I could put the MEF effort into mitigating that. And I don't recall anything with the 15th MEU that was considered to be an insurmountable obstacle at the MSC level.

LtGen Mundy: All right. So one of the issues that's come to light is the lack of waterborne operations with the mechanized company in BLT 1/4 and the 15th MEU, and was that ever a concern or something that rose to your level? Again,

that's units in the division. But you, you know, in the sense that -- I think we're all accustomed to it, you know, that -- for hellebore operations or air assault operations, you wouldn't consider a unit ready unless they had it done, they had Marines in the back. They had to, you know, fly the aircraft over water, over land or whatever the case may be.

But have we taken the same approach with mechanized operations and in particular mechanized companies that form part of a BLT in a MEU?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): That usually came to me through EOTG and their observation training programs. And I don't recall anything associated with water operations being brought to my attention as a concern. I know we're keeping a close eye on -- because the training windows, again, across the entire spectrum of the work of training, at least after composite, but being able to accomplish all that, given the COVID constraints, restrictions, all those things. I do remember them being a little concerned to make sure that the METS could be evaluated associated for mostly the raid type operations and things like that.

But it was more a case of keeping a close eye on this to make sure that they're ready and always more and the consequences of what are they need to flag for me that the MEU is not going to be capable of doing when I send them out to

MARFORPAC, for example. So I had a time, I did say, yes, they're certified in these, but not in these type things.

LtGen Mundy: But so almost by exception and kind of what they're --

LtGen Osterman (Ret): By exception and where EOTG was concerned about the -- the performance of the unit or the availability of training based on whether constraints, COVID restraints, shippable ship availability, all those things that come into play when you're trying to execute any kind of training, frankly.

LtGen Mundy: Right. I guess the thing we're trying to

drive at here is and it's all, you know, now we're making changes to ensure units do this ahead of time. But how did we get to the point where, you know, EOTG courses would not -- like the raid courses or units as a part preparatory prior to chop would not have, you know, come together the -the amphibious assault vehicle is called "amphibious" for a reason. And, you know, why we wouldn't expect those units to come together and do more in the water, for example. We're just kind of grappling with that, I think is how we got to that point where we focus on doing a raid with the mechanized company that's only on land, but never having go out and do something at sea or even if it was to go down off Red Beach or something, go out and cut a square in the ocean to come from the sea ashore and then conduct a raid. That's really what we're grappling with here. And there's no --

there's no good answer to it. But I just thought I would ask.

So throughout this investigation, Jody, force generation has been raised by several senior Marines. And I'm interested to get your perspective on that. If you have any concerns with the force generation model, particular as they apply to personnel and training readiness for deploying units.

LtGen Osterman (Ret): Yeah, I think, you know, historically we've had synchronization problems that existed for many years relative to force generation timing, operational deployment timing, and particularly in accomplishing requisite training. Mostly because the manpower cycles and training program deployment cycles don't match. I know we've looked at it for a long time, and what I've noticed is that increasing the deployment to dwell ratio helps to mitigate that a little bit because you can -- you can't get away from the manpower surge in the summer months all the way, starting with recruiting and how that cascades down through, you know, the making of a Marine.

But as those operational demands keep rising, it gets harder and harder. There's no buffer in there. So it gets harder and harder to synchronize those -- availability of manpower with training availability with the operational deployment requirements that are out there. So it's historically

been there, still exists. I did -- I tried to do that and obviously you were helpful in this where you tried to go to a model of authorizing in stride individual replacements. So this was particularly effective Special Purpose MAGTF, Central Command, where, you know, individuals would go out in the middle of a deployment which would free the individual the incoming individual to go off to school, do PCS, whatever that timing requirement was, and then the replacement individual would then transcend the headquarters rotation and actually provide continuity for the next headquarters that rolled in.

So, you know, trying to get away from our standard paradigms to make that work better or mitigate the synchronization issues. But it obviously gets harder when you need distinct unit cohesion, you know, for higher level METs and things like that. But at least on the individual training aspects, it going, you know — being able to accomplish individual training rotation seemed to help mitigate it a little bit.

LtGen Mundy: Would it help if MEF commanders were allowed to, you know, pick and choose units based on where they are in terms of whatever material or training readiness more so -- I mean, I know that there's a -- it's not a complete, hey, the MEF wants control and Headquarters, Marine Corps and our force sync process force management. And then force sync process, you know, it's a collaborative

effort. I recognize that. But did you feel like the MEF had a voice and was able to say, this unit's -- we want to shift this one around for whatever reason. It's going to be better if we send this organization out here as opposed to this deployment?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): That would help some. I think the genesis of the problem is really in our manpower management aspect of things. Probably best to talk to General Castellvi a little bit more. He worked with manpower team flexibility in his manning about where to assign the individuals that were coming. So in other words, instead of his feast or famine kind of thing, he tried in general terms to have more of an even flow across the division to avoid the feast and famine kind of routine that becomes very disruptive.

So I would say that the say and that part of the manpower assignments is probably one of the things that would help out a lot. So I don't know the details of that model, but I can't remember them, but I do remember that seeming to help in terms of being able to have the units ready rather than going to the traditional lose everybody after the deployment.

LtGen Mundy: Right.

LtGen Osterman (Ret): Get them all to PME School before you've got to inform your units and do collective training. You know, things like that.

LtGen Mundy: I used call it when -- in Bahrain to kind of narrow the amplitude instead of these big ups and downs. Get it where it's a little bit flatter if you can. Jody, I want to go back to the first question that I asked. It was really out of sync but as we kind of wind up with the last few questions here, I was made aware during the course of this investigation that the 26th MEU -- an AAV assigned to 26th MEU sank off the coast of North Carolina on 11 July 2019, barely a year prior to this incident. And it doesn't really have any bearing on the 15th MEU but just contextually for how we pass on lessons learned. I'm interested to know if you were aware of this mishap in any associated, you know, again, lessons learned that were discussed in the forming and training of MEU's.

And here specifically, I know you were around after the Jason Rother incident. We're all keenly familiar, especially those of us older guys. And it was frequently, you know -- in fact, I can remember as a battalion commander at 5th Marines and Colonel Dunford was my regimental commander. And he said, before you go to CAX, I want you review Jason Rother -- make sure you have a PME with your officers on the Jason Rother incident. So, you know, from a standpoint of a learning organization, how these things get passed around. Is this something that you were aware of, the 26th MEU incident and was it discussed in the text of 15th MEU, making sure you're safe on this, that, or the other?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): I wasn't aware of the mishap and nor did I see any investigation or safety reports. So I would say, you know, to your question, the -- similar to the Rather incident, the distribution of this kind of after actions would be helpful.

LtGen Mundy: And that leads in to this next question, you know, what changes to Division and or MEF policies or staff practices would you recommend as you look at this incident?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): I read the endorsements in detail from MARFORPAC and I MEF and the recommendations that are in there seemed to be solid recommendations and valid and recommend that they be incorporated. I did read an open source the other day that the criteria for getting back into waterborne operations -- and again seems to be very, very good and well thought out in terms of how to get back to employing AAV's in waterborne operations safely.

LtGen Mundy: So you concur with the endorsements. No, further recommendations other than what you saw?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): As it pertains to the, you know, the policies and staff practices, exactly.

LtGen Mundy: Any concerns that are outside the scope of this investigation that the service that our Marine Corps should address?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): Probably will have to be refined a little bit for me, very broad. Obviously, but so I'll probably keep it relative to the investigation. I do believe that the AWC and ADC billets in the MEF should always be filled. As you pointed out, the scope and scale of the responsibility a the wing and at the division level are enormous. And so just as I have that the MEF with the deputy, I mean, we were still it was difficult, you know, to engage in all the fronts that you would like to engage on.

So I recommend that -- as far as I can, sir, the service address.

LtGen Mundy: Okay. All right. And then just as anything else that is there any question that you think I should be asking you that I haven't asked or anything else you want to add?

LtGen Osterman (Ret): I don't think so. I mean, I guess just in conclusion, just to reiterate the fact that, you know, just not having a lot of active -- having it be over a year ago and not having access, you know, particulars, it would allow me to remember specifics and all that. Without that, it's just been a little difficult to get into the details of all of this. But, no, I can't think

of anything else as far as things to be asked.

LtGen Mundy: Okay. Thanks, Jody.

[The Investigative Interview closed at 1016, 23 April 2021.]

I, LtGen C. E. Mundy III, attest that the preceding transcript is a true and accurate verbatim account of the interview of LtGen (Ret) Osterman held on 23 April 2021.

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

C. E. MUNDY III LtGen, USMC [The Investigative Interview commenced on 1437, 21 April 2021.]

[WIT: BGen R. Shea]

[IO: LtGen C. Mundy]

[CR: SSgt (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)

LtGen Mundy: So this is Lieutenant General Mundy. I'm here with Brigadier General Bobby Shea conducting an interview related to the investigation looking into the 15th MEU mishap involving an assault amphibious vehicle off the island of San Clemente on 30 July 2020. So you read the investigating order and it's pretty clear there. Let me just kind of seem set here for you.

BGen Shea: Yes, sir.

LtGen Mundy: Hopefully, we'll get the juices flowing and you're free to refer to your notes at any time.

So for context, the months leading up to this incident are reflective of both the typical I MEF Optempo life and the operating forces, the Fleet Marine Force, as well as, extraordinary events such as COVID, and other factors. And I acknowledge the cumulative demand on staff bandwidth on commanders, especially where leadership oversight was required. But just to jog your memory of the environment in early 2020, here are the efforts that we've identified that you all were dealing with at the time. Reaction to the Soleimani killing and

a possible TIPFID; the flow of the TIPFID to support CONPLAN 1422; security for support to the USNS Mercy, I realize that might have been a division task, not anything to you, but perhaps you were involved in that; support to Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego; modifications to the ITX schedule; and then later a revamped 15th MEU realistic urban training event, which was inside their PTP; force generation for requirements in INDOPACOM and CENTCOM just the normal GFM stuff; units supporting MRF D, SPMAGTF, CRCC, and the 31st MEU UDP deployment; compression of the ARG MEU workups from three to two at sea periods; a response to COVID, which would have included quarantine requirements for deploying and redeploying units, as well as all the atmospherics and all the stuff stemming from USS Theodore Roosevelt incident; planning and executing force design initiatives, which could've included continuing actions related to divestitures and unit organizational changes.

In the example here, Bobby, that I'm using is evolving the MEU towards 2030. I know 15th MEU -- I mean, I was out -- I received it -- I was like everybody else going, wow, that's got some unique capabilities on it. There was Task Force Southwest, I think continued during this time. Native Fury, an operation that I own as the MARCENT Commander, as well as, of course,

eventually the I MEF change of command, which occurred two days prior to this event.

So with that as a backdrop, I'm just going to start and ask you a couple of questions and we'll take it from there. For the record, please state when you assumed command of 1st MLG.

BGen Shea: Yes, sir. I assumed command on the 19th of July 2019.

LtGen Mundy: And now with that scene setter kind of taking you back in time near the end of 2019 and the first six months of 2020, what types of challenges did the MEF face, generally, but your Group as a part of it, specifically?

BGen Shea: As you alluded to, sir, we had a couple kind of lingering -- not force designed, but future force 2025 decisions that we were still executing. In December of 2019, we are completing our plan of action and milestones for the deactivation of CLR-17 -- or excuse me, CLR-15 no later than 1 July. We on a glide path to how do you take an O-6 headquarters which own supply in Maintenance Battalion and divest all the responsibilities and authorities at that regimental headquarters and either pull them up to the MLG or push him down to those two battalions.

We also had received in December that year the MCBUL

for the activation of 1st LSB. Is pretty loose, it was just going to activate during 2020. So we didn't feel really pressurized by that. For force design decisions, we're deactivating bridge company and divesting ourselves of the bridges and in and around those PTPs. We probably had a couple important exercises from our perspective. One was in the fall of 2019, CLB-15 was acting a command element for both San Francisco Fleet Week and I always get the exercise wrong. But AECE, which was the Arctic exercise in conjunction with the COMSTOCK and other so CLB-15 coming off of that two tap exercise of all the way down from bulk fuel operations in San Diego. All the way up to ADAC in their operational and span control.

The second thing was we had 7th ESB that winter and spring in February, March timeline acting also as a command element for Arctic Edge up in Alaska, up in Fort Greely. So those were kind of two nontraditional exercises that we were -- obviously had staff attention on those just because they were so nontraditional and then, of course, as you mentioned, sir, Native Fury, one of the things where pressure was relieved was we used the December Steel Knight CPXs getting ready for a January MEF X. And based on the things happening over in the Middle East, the MEF commander made the decision to cancel MEF X, to free up

bandwidth, to focus in on operational planning and Native Fury as a mission rehearsal. And so those were kind of the big muscle movements over that winter and spring, sir.

LtGen Mundy: And, you know, just you've been in the MLG before. As you've come up the ranks, was this, in your opinion, a particularly busy time? I mean, overly busy, maybe that's not the right word, but especially acutely busy time?

BGen Shea: I think given the exercise schedule and having the functional battalion of 7th ESB and then CLB-15 operating as command element those certainly did garner additional attention from our staff and from the MEF staff as well. As those, you know, even though they came from the MLG, once they chopped it, they'd go up underneath the MEF staff. Certainly with MLG overwatch, but certainly additional bandwidth requirements for the MEF.

LtGen Mundy: But, you know, you felt like you all were able to handle this, to juggle all?

BGen Shea: Yes, sir.

LtGen Mundy: -- the competing requirements throughout?

BGen Shea: Yes, sir.

LtGen Mundy: Okay, well, I'm going to come back to that and talk just the phrase that you've heard. And many of us have used

it over the course of our career task saturation. But I'll come back to that as I talk about getting a question later on. So in terms of COVID, how would you characterize the impact of COVID on your organization?

BGen Shea: It was big. The first indicators we had was when we were sending 7th ESB and all of its MAGTF attachments up to Fort Greely and March Air Force Base had become, I wouldn't say dedicated, but certainly shifted to attention for Health and Human Services as it was receiving US citizens back from China and the cruise ships and other things like that. So we are starting to get frustrating to our Arctic Edge force flow into Alaska. Very much is in the early stages.

I went and visited our folks over in Native Fury in the UAE and coming back in late March we were certainly the 1st MLG Med Battalion COVID was the mission. And we were dealing with discussions of do we deploy our Med Battalion personnel outside of Southern California in support of national pandemic response, such as ICU nurses or testing facilities? Or do we keep them here in Southern California. Ultimately, Med Battalion stayed where it was and augmented Balboa and Naval Hospital, Camp Pendleton, their ICU and everything like that, because we had such a blue side movement of all those capabilities into the Mercy and other

areas. So we're trying to -- in between the COVID hot spot in San Diego and the COVID hotspot in Los Angeles, we were trying to ensure that our MTFs here in Southern California had sufficient medical capability through our Med Battalion because the blue side had been added in order to deploy to other places in the United States.

We were also tasked with a stabilization ward outside of Naval Hospital, Camp Pendleton, 250 beds. Because quite frankly, in the early unknown's of the COVID pandemic, we didn't know if we're going to have a lot of non ICU patients who require low flow oxygen. So we applied Medical Battalion to that. also applied CLB-11 to be in charge of the isolation center MIOC for Camp Pendleton. We are thinking that many of the units would not be able to do their own training and do things that they had to do for operational readiness and then also care for PUI and COVID positive patients in their own barracks. So because CLB-11 just come back from deployment and was not deployed for a while, we applied them initially to the MIOC mission to Camp Pendleton mission, and then we applied the CLB-13. Those were the missions that we were given and above that we were having three times a week CUBs with General Osterman and I was having daily phone calls with my commanders because the information was

changing so quickly. This is mostly the late March through April timeframe as we were watching the CDC come out with word DoD come out with -- words, state, local, come out with word. It was really important for us to make sure that we were agile and were reacting kind of coherent as a MEF. That was also the opportunity where we had to raise issues at formal schools or formal learning centers, were canceling courses to raise that up to the MEF level and see if there are either alternatives, waivers to COVID travel or if there were mitigation measures or internal training that we could do.

So when you say did COVID affect us? It affects us every everywhere from the specific missions that a CLB Medical Battalion and force flow for 7th ESB as well as our own personal battle rhythm's on how we're addressing and trying to get information out.

LtGen Mundy: So on the guidance that came out -- was receiving the same guidance, did you find it conflicting or confusing? There were changes and did that have any impact on the Group writ large?

BGen Shea: I think there was a lot of uncertainty. I mean,
I can give a couple examples, you know, my Dental Battalion. And
obviously as a Marine officer, I wasn't super intimately familiar

with aerosol producing procedures in a dental atmosphere prior to this. But it caused us to do deep dives hey, this is what the civilian community is doing out in town. What do we do to balance deploying units? How do we mitigate risk to our safety, to our dental personnel, but still maintain readiness? And it was a balance. But I think because we're having so many phone calls, SVTCs and CUBs, I think we had -- we are able to in a more unified way, say we mission essential. Marines and sailors at your post are mission essential. That's why even though you see things, especially here in Southern California, the shelter in place orders that we're getting. This is why you're still coming to work. This is why you're still training and the early guidance that we gave to MLG was we're not going to decide if we're gonna do something. We're going to decide how are we going to do it within the COVID environment, whether it's a hike, whether it's go into the field, whether it's medical or dental readiness. We're gonna figure out how we're gonna do it in the COVID environment.

But you're exactly right, sir. There were a lot of voices speaking simultaneously, whether it was state, local officials, whether it was some of the functional things, whether dentists, doctors, CDC, and then through DoD and the Marine

Corps. And then when the year I think that we did really well was the partnership between I MEF and MCI-West trying to stay very much aligned so that the Marines would see unity of what was happening in the barbershops or the exchanges was the same thing that was happening in their unit.

LtGen Mundy: And then specifically as it relates to the forming and then composite of CLB-15, what challenges did that present in terms of training? So these are good in terms of some macro level events, but now to bring it down to the tactical level for CLB-15 and what you provided the 15th MEU.

BGen Shea: So I thought we were pretty good on playing with CLB-15. Before the relinquishment of the previous commander, we did a CGI. Then we had a FSMAO. They did their MCCRE in January during Iron Fist. They had a couple tasks left over that we were not able to do at WTI because WTI 2-20 was cancelled. And that was the evacuation coordination center in concert with their NEO, HST, and air delivery. So for the ECC we ended up having to certify and MCCRE that portion ourselves since we weren't doing WTI. And for the HST and the air delivery, we had to do that through our normal frag process.

So those were the big movements that were disrupted.

The other ones that were disrupted was because of the PCS -- hold on PCSs. For a time it appeared that CLB-15 was over its TO, even though many of those folks would not be able to do another deployment. So when I received my pre chop brief on 6 March, we really had to go down through the ages to make sure that the CO and Sergeant Major felt the MMEA had really good transparency and visibility on those folks that we still hadn't gotten yet that were going to deploy with them and make sure that the over T/O numbers -- because those folks weren't going to Okinawa and everything, make sure that that was not being masked to MMEA.

Those were the broad things and those were the eaches. And then there were the smaller courses, like I remember lasering focus in on the joint in route care course because that had been canceled. So we talked for a long time about how do we make sure that we have at least one team that's qualified. And I think — this is just from my memory. I think we were able to get a COVID waiver for travel for those folks to go get trained. But that was certainly something that we raised to the MEF.

So we went through some of the courses, sir, that had been canceled. And in each case, we tried to go, okay, how do we mitigate this? How do we change it? And, you know, we tried not to move the goal line on what things in the MEF LOI that had to

be done by chop, what things had to be done by the first underway period. And really worked through the commander to work through those things.

LtGen Mundy: So your G-3, I've read his interview statement and what you're describing to me, I think I would characterize as a very clear prioritization of some units. And I don't wanna put words in your mouth, but you as the Commanding General.

Could you just describe what your philosophy was on this as far as separating out issues? You blow some of the smoke away, and say here's what we've got to focus on.

BGen Shea: So that the CLB was our number one priority and, you know, and there's always tensions for that. When the springtime SLTE was still on, or maybe it was the WTI, there was pressure for us to apply -- I think it was a WTI -- for us to apply forces to that outside the force sync process. And, you know, in an CLB becomes an attractive target of a supply that. But I do remember us saying, no, we're not going to do it, you know, and preserving the CLB. We need WTI for the ECC, HST, and air delivery, but we can't afford to apply the rest of the CLB and disrupt what they're doing. I think -- this is my three. This is not me, sir. He's very good at applying the MEF priorities and my priorities to where we rack and stack and then,

you know, I know it's a later question, but I think we have a really good relationship with the MEF. And when we put in a hard no. In accordance with the priorities I think we're heard on those things. And we weren't cause to apply at CLB-15 to any of the springtime exercises, which was our preference.

LtGen Mundy: Is that generally true in your experience with other CLBs? So the one prior would've been CLB-11 and there was a long gap, I think, in the MEUs. And then I don't know if you had it -- if you sourced another one during your command time, but how did you handle those?

BGen Shea: Those are two?

LtGen: Three CLBs covering different times.

know, I receive CLB-11 back. And we had them applied to, you know, a bunch of different missions, but we knew that they had a long gap. Giving COVID we were able to apply them to the MIOC mission. And then exactly at the time that we requested back to the MEF, we said, hey, we're gonna switch out CLB-11, and we're going to apply CLB-13, and so -- because we think it's really important for CLB-11 to get up on its legs and be able to do its pre deployment. And then with CLB-13, I felt like the MEF understood CLB-13 was going to only apply some caretaker status to the MIOC because there are other training evolutions that we

wanted them to get after. And unlike CLB-11, if a little bit more of a split focus towards the MIOC.

And then, you know, this past March 31 we ceased MIOC operations, which was our recommendation to the MEF. So I felt like we were heard. I felt like we were heard because what we were requesting was in accordance with the published MEF priorities.

LtGen Mundy: Right. I'm going to come back to something you mentioned the MCCRE. That's one of the questions that we were gonna get to anyway. But since you raised it, they conducted their MCCRE in ITX?

BGen Shea: During Iron Fist.

LtGen Mundy: Iron Fist, I'm sorry, at Iron Fist. And then for thier mission essential tasks that they didn't get done, you were able to find some way to conduct a formal evaluation or a formal assessment. Did that include all of the detachments of CLB or -- did you consider sort of we're getting the core but there may be a challenge getting late joins or something like that?

BGen Shea: I think this is -- so obviously unlike the old MSSG. The CLB's are in toto of themselves. I think where when you say did you get all the attachments, I mean that.

LtGen Mundy: I probably was mixing. My MSSG with CLB.

You're right.

BGen Shea: Right. The contracting folks that we added on, sir, you know, we did those and it's very small in comparison to the old MSSGs. I think where we really concentrated our efforts was due to the dynamic that we described to you earlier, sir, was that like almost every MEU brief that we've all uncomfortably maybe it sat through is as you track the eaches the M&RA has not yet given in. You want everybody there pre MCCRE, you want everybody there pre chop. And so in the brief to me, we were nugget down on those ones and twos of, you know, where's the ordinance Chief.

Where's the -- we have one more corpsman we have to source. It wasn't whole detachments, sir.

LtGen Mundy: But there were ones and twos?

BGen Shea: It would be the individuals. Yes, sir.

LtGen Mundy: In the same approach for UET training. So I think CLB has some frequent fliers, EOD, I can't think of any others off the top of my head. But what was your approach to ensuring that they met the MEF order?

BGen Shea: Sir, you're exactly right? The MEF tasked me in the MEF LOI is, you know, ensure the frequent flyers have UET training at the pre chop brief. And I'm gonna get the numbers wrong. As I remember, they were sitting at like 60 to 70 percent

of the entirety of the force UET trained. And then they had briefed that there was two more opportunities in May and June to get that training done. Now obviously fast forward later, I think that there was two periods when the pool was closed. One was due to maintenance and one was due to COVID.

So I wouldn't say I was comfortable with, you know, 60 to 70 percent trained in March but I saw that there was a path forward for them to get the remainder of their training. And in given that our standard is not 100 percent, but just the frequent flyers, sir, I thought we're on a good path to get everybody that we needed trained, trained.

LtGen Mundy: So you didn't meet the composite timeline per the MEF order, but you had a plan to get it taken care of, and so, on. Then post chop, did you maintain a relationship or in sort of an oversight role of the CLB?

BGen Shea: I would say my G-3 did, in concert with the MEU.

I think the MEF LOI -- our task is prior to PMINT that frequent
flyers be UET trained. So the chop date -- my impressions, sir,
is one milestone on the way to the standard.

LtGen Mundy: I thought it was prior to chop, but we'll figure that out. I'm just trying to establish what happened in -- you know, the MLG versus the Division versus the Wing and how everybody approaches this because you're constantly chasing new

personnel. Somebody might have been sick, somebody might be been doing something else. And so, yeah, there's always the onesies and twosies that you're trying to follow up on. So you mentioned the MEF relationship, you know, was good.

It was healthy with higher headquarters and presumably with adjacent MSC's as well. Were there any friction points related to forming and compositing that you recall?

know, after having been in the Wing and MLG, this is probably one of the best relationships that we've had with the MEF staff, that I've seen. Super team player as well as (b)(3),(b)(6),(b)(7)(c) and the G-3 or as a chief of staff, you know, and then laterally as well. I do remember a week before their chop, I called Chris Bronzi and hey, do you have any concerns where we at, good relationship didn't express any concerns at the time.

LtGen Mundy: Okay. Let's talk just -- I mean I think we sort of covered it, but I just want to make sure that I cover it in sufficient detail here. But regarding that, the OPLAN versus GFM. And so, you know, there was a time where we thought we were going to war in Korea and we might have thought we were going to

war with Iran about this time frame here leading up to forming -what I'm calling the forming, leading up to the composite versus
the GFM readiness. So how do you balance those or set priorities
with your subordinates? Between those two?

BGen Shea: I thought we had pretty clear guidance, sir, with regard to where the MEU was and where the RFD was, which was our ready force that we were also by design merging with Native Fury. So I didn't feel that the priorities were in conflict with each other. I thought we had pretty clear guidance on where the MEU was up top and where all the other ones fell out, sir.

LtGen Mundy: Do you have any thoughts about force -- the force generation model that we use in the Marine Corps, you know, we get the force management summits, the force synch conferences. And I sense that maybe a little bit different in the MLG than in the Division, but maybe I'm wrong there. It's come up as a topic. Some complaints, might be a good way to describe it, but I just want to know if you have a perspective on this?.

BGen Shea: I think we do. I mean, I mentioned a little bit earlier, sometimes we get the one off of hey, we need you all support WTI in a couple months. And, you know, we're looking back at the forcing sync process of, we didn't sign up for it during the force synch process. We, you know -- and I get it.

Other priorities, say precedence. And there has to be a reshifting, you know, I'm not going to pretend that I could second guess that process. But I think that's where the friction points rise is when we're asked to support SLTE or other thing outside of the force sync process. But, you know, as I said, when we go back to our priorities and we say this is where the MEU is, is where the special purpose MAGTFs are, this is where the SLTE are, or we can't do it because we're applied to other higher priority things.

So I think the force synch process out without MEF priorities would more difficult for the MLG. But when we're tasked outside the force synch process, we quickly go back to the MEF priorities and rack and stack align in accordance with that, sir.

LtGen Mundy: Speaking of the SLTE. That's also something in several statements that I've read is a major challenge and you just highlighted it. Can you enlighten me on that a little bit?

BGen Shea: Ye, sir. It's a pretty tough pace for us to adequately satisfy. I am sure, between us and I don't want to speak for forced pool and 2nd MLG. But, you know, I say if you can't support something, then I'm caused to support something and back and forth. My understanding is we've recently cancelled one

of the SLTEs going for it. I didn't when I heard that I did not grit my teeth and go, gosh, is it going to hurt my readiness. I said, oh good. Okay, you know, this will give us a little bit of breathing space to get after some other things.

LtGen Mundy: And so know this is interesting not being a logistician or a maintainer. Colonel (b)(7)(c) is that how he pronounces his name?

BGen Shea: (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)

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

But anyway,

okay, we talked about when training is high and things you've got -- training readiness is up. Typically there's -- obviously there's a bathtub coming as you're you sacrificing to get those assets up so that the units can have what they need. I guess just generally, as it relates to, you know, providing the forces to CLB-15 and 15th MEU, did you, or was that a challenge for you to, you know, ensure that they had the best equipment?

BGen Shea: Well, sir, they were coming off a FSMAO from January. So one thing I thought that we had a good sight picture of their true readiness, not paper readiness, not -- I thought we had a good sight picture of their true readiness. And I remember during the pre chop brief on this 6th of March, you know, we went

over specifically where their readiness is, where their mission essential equipment, and their other principle end items. And then I was given an update at the end of March again. And I remember it had gone up, but it was in the eighties and I remember one number being in the low 90s.

So I didn't at any time felt like there was a big gut punch of they came out of the MCCRE at Iron Fist in and FSMAO and they're in some sort of tremendous bathtub readiness. I felt that we were fulfilling the spirit of my new experience of, you know, when I get stuff from 8th Com Battalion, you know, it was supposed to be their best stuff. I certainly felt the same way that we were doing well for CLB-15's. No concentration of any principle end item that that was significantly down hard.

LtGen Mundy: Last question and then I'll take a pause here as we look through some notes and make sure I got everything that I wanted to cover. But any concerns outside the scope of this investigation that you think that the service needs to address?

BGen Shea: And not that -- I'm going to answer a different question, if that's okay, sir. And not that the service needs to address. But I do think that there is a couple human factors that I think would be useful to provide context for the overall investigation, sir. Specifically about that underway period

during the incident, sir.

I think it was a couple weeks before the underway  $\text{period,} ^{\text{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}}$ 

She was there returning OpsO and had just done a bang up job over the past year. And in San Francisco Fleet Week and ATC, and so, we were in the process of changing out the CLB OpsO. So we're pulling that CLB-11 OpsO over to replace her. So from one CLB to another CLB. We were not able to get him out to that underway period. He wasn't UET trained so couldn't get out for that under way period. So the battalion XO was operating as the OpsO and I think that's an important human factor to just think about Compounding that, sir, two days before underway period, (6)(3),(6)(6),(6)(7)(c)

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

was in discussions with Colonel Bronzi about whether or not the CLB CO should get on board for PMINT just because (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)

• Ultimately, the CLB CO did get underway

with them. You know, his remark to us was, you know, if I sit around the house, it'll drive my wife crazy and I'm just going to worry anyway. And he wanted to be on board with his Marines.

But I do think it's important just in the interest of things that could have been splitting the MEU CO's interest is

that you had a CLB whose XO was now operating as the OpsO as well for that one period. And then CLB CO,  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}$   $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}$ 

LtGen Mundy: Those are some serious human factors. And the context is that may have been something on the MEU commander's mind?

BGen Shea: Yes, sir.

LtGen Mundy: Okay, good. Anything else?

BGen Shea: No, sir.

LtGen Mundy: Something I was gonna come back to, and it involves the phrase "task saturation." I'm kind of rewinding and going back and I'm not digging for anything here. It's just I've wondered about with all those activities going on and you said you listed half a dozen more that I wasn't even tracking. Was there a point from your view that you felt like at any time during this period, especially with the overlay of COVID, that the organization was, you know, probably at the limit of its ability to plan, coordinate, direct, supervise, all that sort of stuff? And you can answer that from your MLG perspective, but also kind of what you saw looking laterally at your MSCs in the MEF.

BGen Shea: You know, there was a lot going on, sir, you know, and COVID was keeping us very sharply focused. In some

ways on, okay, what's the most important thing and where are we risk here. You know? Of all the courses, you know, PME courses, everything else getting canceled, you know. The MSC CG's were cause you go, okay, what are the most important ones to, you know, of the staff NCO PME or the joint en route care course, which are ones that you want to raise up to the MEF to have them address because important to us. Balance outs, sir, in preparation for this, I went through some of the SITREPS that I sent General Osterman, you know, in January, February, March. And then I was kind of struck with, sir, me, my sergeant major will be going to Alaska to visit these folks, to UAE to visit these folks. Then I'll be going to DC for the logistics board. All those things after my visit to Native Fury all went away. all those TAD's, you know, a lot of our leadership and conferences and everything else -- in some respect that was a tremendous gift because everything else that was going on with COVID, formation at the 15th MEU, you know, 7th ESB up in Alaska, you know, frustrated movements due to COVID pandemic, having all those TAD's cancelled. And quite frankly, a lot of folks

cancelled their leave as well. I'm not going to say it perfectly compensated for the bandwidth that was sucked up from COVID, but it certainly was an all hands on deck type of situation, if you will.

LtGen Mundy: You know, it's counterintuitive, but you're right. I'm thinking back to my own experience in the same way it slowed things down somewhat. So I guess I don't want to overstate the -- it could have had unintended consequences. In my own personal example of kind of focusing more down and in on the command because I wasn't able to travel either. I couldn't get back over to the Middle East to visit the Marines. I had to focus on, you know, what was in front of me there at the command. So I was able to cover a lot more ground. I hadn't thought of it from that perspective.

BGen Shea: There was a learning curve of, okay, how do you communicate with the battalion commander who's in ROM? How do you normally call all your commanders and senior enlisted together? We've got to talk through this. It's going to be a free flowing discussion. Okay. As we all learn how to better do conference calls and SVTCs in a more disciplined way and we were learning all of that, sir.

LtGen Mundy: Were you doing remote telework, 50/50, port

and starboard or anything like it?

BGen Shea: It depended on the sections, sir. If you ask the majority of our bulk fuel guys or motor T mechanics, it was situation normal plus masks and a lot of hand washing. And my dispersing folks went to a kind of a split shift of morning shift and then an evening shift. And then for the most part my headquarters was full on. We were just, you know, kind of battling through how to do conference calls and VTC is in what used to be a much more free flowing environment. And then, of course, sprinkled throughout all of that was Marines who -- a lot of Marines and sailors who depended on schools for their child care no longer had that capability. So even if we made an operational decision about, hey, this section is going to go port and starboard, there were the individuals except for, you know, staff sergeant so and so, except for Colonel so and so. know, there was some folks plucked out of our formation who, not by design, but due to need due to family circumstances, would necessarily have to be teleworking. And, oh, by the way teaching their kid's homework while they're trying to do logistics at the same time.

LtGen Mundy: Multiple children at times. So just to bring it back to the original question on task saturation. This is the

follow up on the task saturation, was it really offset by, you know, some things not -- your plate being clear to an extent where you couldn't quantify it necessarily, but qualitatively, you would say, hey, it made things some things -- we were doing a lot easier? It was busy, COVID certainly complicated it. But in some ways, it also helped you in terms of knowing what the priorities were and clearing out some things that would have otherwise taken your attention away?

BGen Shea: I think that's a fair way to say it. Do I think that cancellations of leave, PCS, TAD's, all those things, one hundred percent compensated for the staff bandwidth and commander focus that we going to have on COVID? No, but it certainly helped. And then within that of all the tasks that we're dealing with, you know, obviously that's when we started having to make decisions of okay, what are we not going to do or what are the things that we might have to do average instead of doing it as perfectly as we want to, sir. LtGen Mundy: Okay. Let's pause briefly here. So, General Shea, I want to ask you in the context of when you had lots of things going on, so many priorities, you know, training and ensuring Marines are qualified or certified to do certain activities. How do you, as a commander, either through your staff and your subordinate commanders or personally, identify and deal with the issues that are most important versus

a lot of lesser importance?

BGen Shea: So specifically in talking about March, sir,

March pre chop and that was when Native Fury was wrapping up.

That was when the MEU was chopping. That's when really the

effects of COVID and kind of the tasking of MLG was starting. So

you're right, there was a lot going on in March, a lot going on in

April.

A couple things, one, the MLG, we followed the MEF's kind of battle rhythm of Cubs of when they were doing Cubs three times a week for COVID, we were doing teleconferences right immediately after that with my commanders. And then specifically the 15th MEU, as I said, I got my pre chop brief on the 6th of March. That was prior to me going to the UAE, prior to me being in ROM. I did notice during March we we're having a lot of Cubs and we have a lot of telephone calls. At the end of March — and there's a lot of information going around. So you've got a lot of flashing lights. How do you pick out that one to? One of the things that I did was at the end of March, I directed all of — we were going to on March 30, I was gonna go through with all my commanders to include my 0-5 commanders, and they were going to

give me a heat chart of all the different ways that they were affected by COVID. And whether there was green, yellow, or red or, whether it was getting better or whether it was getting worse because there was a lot of information being passed, "hey, this was new this morning." I want to bring it up. "Hey, this was new this afternoon." I want to bring it up. Quite frankly, for me in that period that March 30th brief was kind of the leveling brief of there's been a lot of information going around in Tamberg's teleconferences and Cubs. Let's put it all together in one place as a staff, as all of my five commanders and above in one fell swoop. And let's look at this as MLG and take a look at where our biggest risk was. And that was kind of the foundation of, okay, as we now start to get more incremental information over April and May, this March 30th brief is going to be the standard for on assessing kind of. On how we assess cumulative risk over the next couple of months.

LtGen Mundy: Yeah. Thank you. The risk is really what I was trying to get at. Some risks you can take and nothing happens but other risks you take if you drop it, there's worse consequences. So that's good. I don't have anything further.

I'll ask you once again if you have any closing comments. Well, this is Lieutenant General Mundy concluding the interview with Brigadier General Shea, Commanding General of 1st MLG.

[The investigative interview closed at 1526, 21 April 2021.]

I, LtGen C. E. Mundy III, attest that the preceding transcript is a true and accurate verbatim account of the interview of BGen R. Shea held on 21 April 2021.

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

C. E. Mundy III
LtGen, USMC

[The Investigative Interview commenced on 0715, 22 April 2021.]

[WIT: MGen liams]

[IO: LtGen Mundy]

[CR: SSgt (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) ]

LtGen Mundy: This is Lieutenant General Mundy. I'm interviewing Major General liams who was the Commanding General, the 3 Marine Aircraft Wing on 30 July 2012 so we'll. See the assistant coming out of the Marine Corps is appointed me to conduct a command investigation of the facts and circumstances surrounding the forming of the 15th MEU associated with an a Venus app that occurred off the coast of San Clemente Island on 30 July 2020. Specifically, the act Max directed that I investigate the facts and circumstances surrounding. Number one, the formation and compositing the 15th MEU. Number two, training material readiness around information positing of the 15 MEU and number 31 MF oversight of the 15th. You the act max further directed that I address the decisions impacting these subject matters to include the discharge of supervisory and oversight responsibility exercised by the command up to the meth level and Kovik 19 impacts. So to begin with, just again, as I said, as I stated a minute ago, to set the scene here to provide some context, the months leading up to the incident are reflective of

both typical life in.

MGen Iiams: The fleet.

LtGen Mundy: Marine force and in one method.

MGen Iiams: Particular.

LtGen Mundy: Op tempo was high.

MGen Iiams:

LtGen Mundy: As well as extraordinary events.

MGen Iiams: Such as Cauvin.

LtGen Mundy: And other factors.

LtGen Mundy: And I want to acknowledge the cumulative demand on on staff.

MGen Iiams: Bandwidth.

LtGen Mundy: And for.

MGen liams: Leadership.

LtGen Mundy: Oversight.

LtGen Mundy: To jog your memory of the environment in early 2020.

MGen liams: Here are just.

LtGen Mundy: A few of the efforts. Security force support to the USNS Mercy that I think primarily was coming out of first Marine Division.

MGen Iiams: Not.

LtGen Mundy: Not your wing.

MGen Iiams: But.

LtGen Mundy: Talking broadly here across the net support to Marine Corps recruit Depot San Diego, modifications to I.T. X to dash 20. I believe it was canceled, actually.

MGen Iiams: Yes, sir.

LtGen Mundy: And then later, of course, on the 15th MEU a revamped realistic urban training schedule ordinary or normal force generation requirements for both INDOPACOM and CENTCOM, which would have included saucing forces for Murphy, SPMAGTF F.C. ARCC and UDP. Such other UDP deployments, such as the 31st MEU compression of the Army, workups from three to two ADC periods. Response to cosied the quarantine requirements for deploying and redeploying units. As well as all the atmospherics and some of the precautions stemming from the covered cases aboard USS Theodore Roosevelt.

In addition, there were also, I know that I MEF was also planning and executing forced design initiatives, which might have included divestitures and the stand up of new units and unit organizational changes is specifically here. I'm talking about trance transforming toward New 2030. And, of course, the wing plays a role in that as well.

LtGen Mundy: Rossow requirements to source continue sourcing Marines for Task Force SW and I have a question. You know, later on you can maybe expound on this. I'm not I'm not aware of any squadron transitions specifically, but maybe you can talk about that when I.

MGen Iiams: Ask you.

LtGen Mundy: One of the first couple of questions. So that's just kind of a scene setter to refresh your memory of everything.

MGen Iiams: That is.

LtGen Mundy: Going on or most, most major things that we've identified that were going on. So to begin with, Wolfie, I'm just going to ask you right up front, when did you assume command of third more?

MGen Iiams: Sir, I assumed command of 3rd MAW on 13 July 2018 and gave up command on 24 July 2020.

LtGen Mundy: Okay, so you gave it up just prior to the incident?

MGen Iiams: Yes, sir. Was about a week to ten days prior.

LtGen Mundy: Okay, thanks for the clarification. Did you during your time as a wing commander, have an assistant wing commander?

MGen Iiams: I did have an assistant wing commander for the first portion of my time in command as a one star. And then I appointed one of my group commanders, MAG-11, and it was Colonel (b)(3),(b)(6),(b) as the HWC following that. And so he was an acting in that position. However, most of the time he was actually out of pocket doing F-35 transition training and actually supporting the commandant on an another investigation or back, I should say, on another investigation into another mishap.

LtGen Mundy: And could you just briefly outline the way that you used your assistant wing commander, both the one star and Colonel  $^{(b)(3),(b)(6)}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ , at least when you add?

MGen Iiams: So I used my FWC to provide probably one level down mentorship to the group commanders so that they felt like they had a sounding board other than just going to the three star and then that one star/senior colonel would as well help them translate their issues and actions and to, you know, an appropriate forum for the F for the CG at the appropriate place and time as well. I had the AWC flying with as many of those units as possible. So between the two of this, we could keep a pretty good pulse on how the units were doing down at the tactical level. And then there would actually be on occasion some just very specific line of sight tasker said. I would give

them to accomplish a couple of things as I had had in the past when I was in AWC. So maybe just briefing at a safety investigation. Or going to research a separate project. But predominately I looked as the AWC as an opportunity to groom that youngster one star or the up and coming colonel and giving them exposure to a MSC level command.

LtGen Mundy: Any specific roles they might have played in the forming and compositing of the ACE to the MEU over.

MGen Iiams: I probably would have used my former AWC, the one star in this for this forming, but he had already departed and that was General Board Shortie. So I had an F-18 individual who is a big call but not a MEU individual. And it's simple.

(b)(3),(b)(6),(b) and since he was also out of pocket, who I leaned on was my chief of staff at the time, who is himself a former a MEU commander at and I think whose name here in a second. But he had he took the first MEU out with the F-35 on it. So I look at him.

MGen Iiams: Yeah. So Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6), (b) is who I leaned on for additional support in the build up of the MEU probably my biggest support was just MAG-39 CO who had a tremendous amount of experience onboard the MEU and was also right there at Camp Pendleton interfacing with them, you commander. And he actually

LtGen Mundy:

had the squadron that was going to be the ACE for the compositing.

LtGen Mundy: Okay. And I forgot to ask it on the assignment of the Colonel ADC, was that something you just did at a hide? You know, pull the colonel out of 3rd MAW or you assisted diam MRA in that.

MGen Iiams: So I used the M&RA and got their blessing, but this was a colonel who had just given up group command and had thought about retirement. No. So I asked them if I could keep him and hopefully with this experience show him that he had a better opportunity, standard Marine Corps. So we kept him for one more year and was really using him not only as AWC, but his specific tasking was to help me with the Queen Elizabeth buildup.

LtGen Mundy: Okay, good, thanks for that. Let's move on.

Next question. Near the end of 2019 and then extending into the first six months of 2020, you know, up until about the time that you would have turned over and left. What types of challenges did your wing face in particular? But thinking broadly for the NSF over.

MGen Iiams: Copy, sir. What I'll do is I'll go over to just kind of some of the overarching challenges and then kind of walk you through, just see the month by month and just the high

points as we went through, including some of the key, I think, interactions set in will hopefully shed some light on the level of supervision and oversight that was occurring during those times. So taking off in late 2019, MA for pack budget controls were, you know, impacting third on ops and readiness and it was we were coming up to the midyear year. We were still in the first quarter. So it was how much were you expending and did we need to throttle that back up? So there was a little bit of a threat to flight hours, but we were staying on profile. We were still building good airplanes. So there was a thought of operational impact on the future. But we were on profile and spending and repairing airplanes. Mission capable rates were coming up. The end of the year, we had a domestiques was scheduled. And because of the current world events, we ended up canceling MEF X and turned into a CPX to set the MEF up for if we actually did start doing an operational deployment other things for third while we had attack our shortfall, that would be looming the next year. So I was working with DC Aviation. had all of our VM cafes were starting to shut down, including 314 and 225 as we were preparing them for transition to the F-35 and we were preparing for the Queen Elizabeth diplomates we had multiple iterations of meetings with the UK and the Navy on how

we were going to do that deployment and then we were having challenges as well again and attack our portfolios were are shutting down the MBA program and transitioning them to the F-35 inside the mine. The math for exercises. We were going to do Steel Knight that fall and we had been planning this for a while. Has told me the Division CG and I, even before we had taken command, had forecasted we would like to do as close to a regimental lift as we could possibly do. So we had worked our way up through a battalion minus to a battalion, to a battalion reinforced and then four steel night lay late that fall in 2019. We actually did the regimental minus lift between the two MSD. Other things that we had going on the time we had UDP across all of the TIMSS going downrange, some of which had embedded support for the 31st MEU. We had special purpose MAGTF out and in. had the MEU working up for the Macon Island and all of the workups that had to go for the boat as well, because to make an island had some challenges of their own. We had WTI that were we're on schedule. And for the more we execute a winter fury and a summer fury event that works gives his squadron the opportunity to work up all of their quolls to be able to be ready for the WTI. We had the SLTEs third MOTHE does the SL here, the ITX a bit differently than the others. We actually put a mag

headquarters on to the self and run it as a combat headquarters and I let that MAG commander do all of his battle rhythm that he needs to do and actually build a composite mag there on the other In addition to that, we had the fracs for WTG, we had the Southwest border and then we also support Cal Fire. So we actually have to have squadrons that are on alert in the UH and the MV-22 VMM squadrons and the 50 threes to be able to go do fire buckets for the local area marre for Packwood's in a period of not concern but for me in meetings telling me that a, you know, for all of the money that we're spending on airplanes, what we need to start generating readiness is really at about that time that the more over the course of that period we had gone from being about T-3 and having units be just in time ready for deployments to actually units were key one, you know, in advance of their deployment and we had worked the entire wing up to a like a T-2 rating writ large. But the mentality from the MEF, even with that pressure to generate readiness for our MARFORPAC, I felt was we were keeping things safe and saying, you do as much as you can do with what you have. And then, you know, we'll report the impact. Some of the other challenges that we had out there were debt calls for them use just because the available periods for the boats were getting longer. So they were spending

longer in the yard. And when they did come out, we'd have issues. And if I remember correctly, there was one to Macon Island that caused us to have a reduced opportunity on board the boat there for deck quals. So one of the things that we had to do the MA is essentially have units on standby and ready on very short notice for any pop up MFM available so we would stay in very close contact with the MEF to the ESG so that we can know when any deck was available so that we did get MV-22, 53s. F-35 is on the big deck was available and the skids as well to get out, get out there and actually get their deck walls. it's something that we had reported in Durrs for quite some time, that the, the paucity of deck quolls, you know, puts us at risk for actually being amphibious force as the forces I was alluding to that, you know, we'd be operating more from ships. As you pointed out, in late February, COVID starts to become a predominating challenge for the MEF MSC. But, you know, that's laid over the top of each one of the tumescence that I had that we're working through just the standard individual maintenance challenges inside. They're their own TIMSS, which can go into if we needed to. But I think that we still had a training focus throughout this period. They were still training opportunities. And I'll talk about here in a minute. And the COs were still

setting good standards that, you know, let us adhere to all of the COVID requirements and push as hard as we could push. And we were going to push, but we weren't going to break any rules and we weren't going to hurt the Marines or break the machines. So if I could just step you through maybe some of the highlights of the month by month as we went through, sir. If that would be of use.

LtGen Mundy: Yeah. Just I would say briefly, if you want to yeah.

MGen Iiams: Yes, sir. So I would just say in November, on 13 November, we had the -- we all attended all of the MSD, the 15th MEU change of command which I think just reflected that we were all intimately involved in who was in charge. And there were good relationships there. We were doing some Queen Elizabeth stuff at the time as well through December. The meth actually has a pretty good battle rhythm where they have the MEU, MIG, and CG meetings on a regular basis. Those continued and, you know, we had the increased battle rhythm from the 11th through the 17th for the effects c.p we got into January. We had the mass summit and the Q FTB, where we talked about my squadron 164 is actually doing the resilience study for the MEF. So that came up. And I actually like the way that the MEF puts us

together in that the the Q mpb is essentially a reconciling in the same forum with, hey, we're pushing really hard on the MEF summit, we're talking about readiness, we're talking about, you know, shortfalls and how we're getting over those. And at the same time, then we actually talk about all of the force preservation after that. So it goes hand in hand. That was on the 17th in my command, getting to know the commander show I got. I did a dinner on the 25th and I did one previously on the Twelve for my two MAGs. And I saw all of my COs from 164 to 67 and 465 talked to them about the upcoming MEU deployment later that year into February. I actually had a personal office call with Colonel Bronzi on the seventh at 1500, and I've got an email that I can probably 40 of from my group commander that talks about the interface that those two had. My MAG-39 that led up to the actual office call and where we were on kind of prepping for the MEU, MAG-39 was my ACE going out to SLTE so we actually did 2-20 and I went out and visited and I got to see 164 out onsite at 29 Palms at this time acting as part of that composite MAG and which was timely because then they start to really step up their operations as we get into March and April and prepare preparation for their chop. So went back and talked to that group commander again in March. I did a MAG-39 visit and on the 11th the we

actually did at the MEF headquarters a 15th MEU D-270 prep brief. So I did a prep brief with MAG-39 to make sure that we were in line that morning. And then we sat down and went through in detail all of the preparations from all of the MSD for the upcoming 15th new deployment also that that month two to 6 March 1, '64,, even though we weren't covered, I did a covered waiver for them and sent them out to Davis, Mont. Them, and had them essentially stay on base out there to do their MCCRE with some joint assets that we had out there. Complexities at this time were the WTI got cancelled the next SLTE, which was I think 3-20 that went end up being cancelled. And then we step into April. This is where it gets hot and heavy into the turnover of multiple units for UDP and the MEU I did a quick phone call with the Division CG just on continuity of ops at this time, because I think we were all getting a bit concerned as to how much COVID was impacting us and how hard should we be leaning on the units to continue to produce vice. You know, should we shut them down? And I would just say the Division CG, I were both of the opinion that we think continuing to push on the accelerator but not push the other units too hard is that's naturally we should not shut down and there should be a continuity of arts. We did the MEF summit and a Q NPB later that month in April and there were

readiness decrements already showing there. And we talked about how we would kind of work through those and what was acceptable. And from my point of view, and I can talk about a later as I was like 75 to 80 percent was kind of my threshold that I wanted folks to strive for. And that's about what we reported at the domestic summit. And we were still doing the -- I still had a weekly or bi weekly with the CG to be able to express concerns and that geo MEU MIG piece. So the only other one to mention was probably in May which is tracking that the compositing happened, I believe it was on the 11th of May moving forward and yeah, and then the MEF's summits and talk about the new work up, including a TEEP review in July occurred on the 22nd. So boring going into any further excruciating detail on other stuff that was happening. Sir, that's kind that the high points of what was going on for the challenges.

LtGen Mundy: Well, I admire your recollection and your memory. I have a hard remembering what would I eat for breakfast the day before. But I know you did some research on this, and that's a great rundown, Wolfie. Thank you. I just want to kind of go back in and ask a couple of follow ups as it relates to to this. So just in terms of Op tempo volume of tasks. How would you characterize that period based on your experience? You know,

over a long career, you said you were an AWC yourself at one time. So just kind of looking at it from, you know,, this specific period of time, how would you characterize it? You know, more or less about the same unusually busy, you know,, just something like that.

MGen Iiams: Oh, (5)(3), (b)(6), (b) . I'll characterize it in two ways for you. The first thing that I wrote on here for the challenges was like 19 to 20, was busy with two exclamation points. I really did not have an AWC and my chief was intending to retire. So I was picking up a lot of this myself. And as COVID hits and as you look at my notes, you can see a very marked change and my handwriting is it. I am working hard right.

LtGen Mundy: And yeah, okay. So I may come back to that later on. I think that's an important point. Just about everything that was going on at this time. And like the other commanders have done, you know, you've highlighted a lot of things that I listed, most of the things that were sort of MEF level. And thanks for reminding me about Sulimani, the pull to support the OPLAN that we thought we were going to execute at that time. That was another, yes, or task. So anyway, that's a good rundown. And then just as it relates to COVID and you've alluded to it a couple of times and appreciate you telling me

about the, you know, the deliberate effort to continue operations, continuity. Bopp's, no, shut down of training, really. So did you see COVID as just additional friction or was it, you know, a near impossible and pediment.

MGen Iiams: I wouldn't say near a possible impediment. It was a significant challenge. It was a curveball that we didn't know how to hit because we really hadn't seen it before. So, you know, there was a morale hit, folks. Didn't, you know, we're confused about what they should do. Is this a unit? Should they be confused personally from the command deck? You know, we're trying to, you know, give them a sense of confidence. Hey, wear your mask, keep your social distancing. We're gonna be okay. You know, my thing to the Marines was, hey, we're gonna keep calm and we're gonna fight on. We're going to be okay. Well, let's not anybody panic. We're not going to do anything untoward. We're gonna be thoughtful about the way that we approach this. The commanders were concerned as to how do we keep the Marines working or, you know, should we shut down. So we kind of talk to that, work through that. And what we ended up having to do is so that we could protect the Marines and protect the mission is we went to shiftwork and platoon work and separating the Marines, which we haven't done before. So, you know, we typically run day

crew, night crew. Now, we're actually doing all right. Let's take, you know, take half your long ball hitters that are day crew, put them on, you know, one-half the office and the other half are going to be separated because we can't have both crew, you know, one entire crew get taken out and we knew that this was going to impact us and we'd have to figure out our way through So we ran it. You know, some of my groups, I had to shift work, some I had to do platooning and some just did separation. And I told them the goal is, hey, try not to decrements or ops any more than 80 percent. But if you if it's going to just let me know. I'll tell you that they were able to actually sustain, again, about 75, 80 percent with these measures. But it was the increase in the administration, the reporting, the battle rhythm. So, you know, we had additional battle rhythms and had to be put in there as a CG. My time was eaten up every evening because I had stacks of the administrative pieces that had to be signed by the first general officer in the chain of command from MARFORPAC. So anyone who is going to execute PCS, anyone who is going to, you know, go on, leave, emergency, leave, everything else had to be processed up through the CG. So who they were just stacks that you had to go through every single day and every weekend when you came up for all of the geo bachelors who wanted to go

see spouses and even just go between bases, we had to personally sign off on those. And as you can imagine, between all of those, there were multiple grievances that came up in there that even complicated it further. On top of that, you know, while we're trying to get training, you know, we lost the WTI, we lost SLTEs some other det, you know, one or one, which is my big training . squadron and three oh three, my other training squadron. They do a lot of debt work to go get their students trained so they had to do all home training. So we had to come up with new concepts and ideas on how they would do in-house home training. And then there were some things that we had to waiver. So there were some flight physicals and some aviation physiology and I can't remember how many it wouldn't want, but we had a waiver those because the like the aviation physiology folks next to us, we're not running classes because it kove it. So we couldn't get some of those folks in to the S1 tanks.

LtGen Mundy: Okay. All right. Thanks for that. I may come back to that as well, but I want to shift gears a little bit and and maybe ask more directly and you kind of touched on it in your explanation of just kind of what was going on and the challenge you face. But were there any challenges to forming and compositing the ACE for the 15th MEU that you're aware of and did

they in particular have any difficulty achieving the composite timeline, you know, per service and MEF orders?

MGen Iiams: Not per service and MEF orders? I'll say that there was a one of the previous MEU had done a little bit of some early compositing and they remarked about how much of a us, you know, a boon that was for their training. So 15th MEU had asked, you know, hey, can we composite early? We'd like to get the more assets in here with everybody else. And I push back on that just because we're so short assets. And, you know, I promised MEF and I promised 15th MEU that, you know, across the entirety of the mine, we would be able to support them all the way up to the, you know, the traditional chop line with assets from across the Othmar. And at the same time, I'd be able to do a better job of making sure that I keep that squadrons in the debts maintenance ready and actually get all of their other training done because there was still an that work up inside my timeline to get them ready for the chop.

So we reconcile that there was no pushback. I was like, okay, hey Wolfie, thank you. And that was I even talked to the new commander specifically about that during this timeframe, we continue to groom and select aircraft and the augment and we track all of that closely, not just to the chop, but on after

that as well. We stayed in direct coordination with him. You CO throughout the, you know, the work up in the chop timeframe. And I believe we met all of his desires. You know, the email that I've got coming back from my MAG-39 commander shows that, you know, everything that we're doing to support the MEU is ringing their bells. So they seem to happy with the timeline that we're on for the traditional piece. And so, from my perspective, not much impact on the forming and compositing from our point.

LtGen Mundy: Okay. And I think you actually mentioned composite in May that the official date was 20 April but you're right that the ACE may have come in a little bit later, as I recall. Now, reading something unless you unless, you know, it to be otherwise. But it was 2020 April was the, you know, per the NFL why was the date that they were supposed to composite. So let me again, kind of drilling down a little bit on this because I think it's important. Did the units that composited with the MEU have any difficulties completing their MCCRE? You mentioned the MCCRE just a minute ago but here I'm really trying to get at the ACE, not just H. DMM, I think you said 164, and so I am aware that at least in documents that we've looked at, that we could not find any formal MCCRE evaluation for the F-35 det or VMU-1. And so, as you, you know.

LtGen Mundy: Explain this or answer this question, I'd be interested in how you evaluated those units short of a MCCRE.

MGen Iiams: So since the entire unit is not deployed, so the entire unit did not go through or CRE, but the debts get worked up. And so I'm looking at the readiness that we've got going into each one of these units as they get ready to support. So MFA 122, I went back and looked at the fitness reports here. They had very high aircraft readiness. And I actually remember that any and the reports they conducted the SWAT, so they were fully integrated, their XO of the squadron actually went out to be part of the headquarters out there, the 267 that we actually plussed up when you H1 to increase the capacity onboard the Adamu with coordinated that and that unit was at T-2. Plus as they cut their debt of skids or you h h over to the Damu Ace 465 was the c h 53 that trained up all over their cruiser. Crews were all trained, current, ready, and that squadron was currently at T-1 when they chopped their det.

LtGen Mundy: Okay, so you were there for the formation and I think the deployment to the 11th, you leave your span of time. So I guess we're kind of looking at this, you know, from the perspective of fulfilling the Marine Corps order and the next order on completing training requirements prior to composite or

if not prior to composite, then shortly after that. And was it your experience that this is sort of the way it was done with previous fixed wing debts that form part of the MEU and and perhaps VMU? I don't remember the 11th MEU went out with a VMU. I think they did.

MGen Iiams: But picture.

MGen Iiams: Yeah. So we'll.

LtGen Mundy: So.

MGen Iiams: We're down to.

LtGen Mundy: Three. I guess the two is just to be straightforward. There was no MCCRE for these other DETs. The MCCRE is really focused on the border.

MGen Iiams: Yes, sir. So yeah. So the -- it's that squadron that ends up doing the MCCRE in this case, as in the 11th, you know, they met all of their PTP, had some physio waivers, I believe they did their McRee on a DFT out, as I said, out to Tucson. We actually put them through a full maintenance inspection. So they did their CNF maintenance inspection in April. I think they got like, well, above a 90. So they did really, well. They did a CGIP and then he as he s headquarters, they were certified as warfighting ready on the training readiness scale. So then we bolt into that squadron the DET. So

they get their airplanes and everything else. And then as we composite then as they do the workup they get certified during the workup as the ACE.

LtGen Mundy: Okay, and then same general question about swim qualifications and underwater egress is, you know, and specifically is that something that you focus on or that the wing insures is complete? Again, for NSF order that this is all, you know, that you're as close to a hundred percent as you possibly can be, at least for the frequent fliers whatever kind of running up short on the actual wording. But you all you I'm sure the ace takes that seriously.

MGen Iiams: Yes, sir. That is part of the debrief that we do. So when they come up and they talk about the readiness and all of the dead commanders are in there and we talk about each one of them okay. Have you met all of the PTP requirements or all your qualifications? Good. How many are you short? So we briefed out and out in total. So we know we've signed a full up round to the new.

LtGen Mundy: Good now, again, shifting gears, and you've also talked about talking to General Castellvi the Division. So you've touched on it but I want to follow up generally in terms of the relationships that your command had that you and your

staff had with I MEF and you know, other MSC. Were there any friction points that might have affected the forming or compositing.

MGen liams: No, as a matter of fact, I thought the way that we kind of carried the MEF headquarters in the Adama's seas and interactions we had multiple touch points and opportunities for like the MSC to talk directly to the MEU commander. So one of the things that I appreciated was the Geo MEU MIG meeting that General Osterman had included. Those MEU commanders, special purpose MAGTF have commanders and the ones even the ones that were working up. So, you know, from my perspective, I know I'm going to be held accountable for even though they're not mine, you know, whether the airplanes are flyable or not, whether we have a problem with an air crew or not. So we continue to track that even after they chop, which, you know, these forums and being able to talk and go a, you know, I see that 164 is only carrying four up, you know. Are you concerned at the maintenance ready of the readiness of the MV-22. So that gives us an opportunity in front of the DCG at the MEF who, you know kind of oversees a lot of the build up and the MEF commander to have these kinds of cross levelling opportunities as we get ready to deploy units. The boss -- also General Osterman also gave us a

just a GO level opportunity to to chat with him and then, you know, on frequent occasions, which is Dallas up and talk to his individually increased significantly when we got into a takeover. It just because the battle rhythms and the reporting got, you know, significantly more important and then even beyond that, there were, I would say at a social level, we were all very comfortable. We had multiple opportunities. The CDU would actually bring us and we would do a I like for the summit. We do the summit in the and I want to know we'd do an extended just geo luncheon kind of social, but a, you know, an ability to talk for talk about things that, you know, just making it more palatable. Sir, what did you mean by this in getting good guidance from him face to face? We can do that during the luncheon. And I think that that brought us all together much closer as a year. A MEF and MSC supporting staffs and as I said before, I really liked the way that I wouldn't a big fan of the time to have to do a mass summit and then the QF EPB. But it did cause you to actually balance and think about, you know, keep you from overemphasizing, you know, hey, I've got to get up, you know, ops and readiness it at all costs. Well, you do that. And then right after lunch, you're going to be reporting, you know, all of the force preservation issues that you've created by doing that.

So I thought that that was a good balancing there. And at the MEF summit, that was where we actually talked about all of our readiness, DRRS issues, material readiness, in great detail, probably more detail than I wanted. That is a wing cause. For whatever reason, one man now has an Alawi for aviation readiness. So staff members do brief a piece of, you know, the more readiness, which is just uncomfortable from an MSC and I used to tell cars, cars, how come? I'm mean, only one it gets is read. It is briefed by a staff officer. But I think that was just a leftover from you know, times pass it. Hey, are we giving them all to where they needed to because we were at P-3 or T-4 and there were significant investment in interest, says who was it going into the right places we'll.

LtGen Mundy: Did you maintain relations -- your assistant wing commander when he was there or your chief of staff maintain relationships? He s CEO aftershock?

MGen Iiams: Oh, well, yes, we do not. And we do it I think, very respectfully. We completely understand that he is working for a different commander. But all of the maintenance things that they're going to need, especially during the workup phase, still come from 3rd MAW. So it's either coming from my mouth or we're going to support them with people. So, sir, I

track their maintenance readiness every single day. I look at their flight hours, I look at the aircraft utilization. I look at these specific downers that they have on airplanes. And we'd actually talk to Colonel Bronzi in advance about the opportunity to, hey, when you get out on float, if you desire mid cruise, we will send you a maintenance tiger team to just kind of tighten up the ace as needed as you go forward knowing full, well, that we need that contact so that they can stay t two throughout the deployment. So, yep, we stayed in touch with Spot throughout that. So Spot Demanbro is the CO I was concerned he was not living up to the standard. So the MAG CO I know was talking to spot on a regular basis and was asking me, you know, hey, will you please just give him a little room to breathe here? I was concerned because he was only putting up about four aircraft on the board out of the we had him at 12. I had him at 14, took him to 12, and I believe he was going to deploy with ten and I thought he should have been put more up there. And I was worried that the maintenance department wasn't putting out. And what he was actually doing is he was grooming his maintenance department, giving them time to recharge which is why he did so, well, on his CNAF inspection. Okay.

LtGen Mundy: Thanks. A little bit different line of

questioning here. What guidance did meth with MEF commander provide on how to balance OPLAN and GFM and readiness so if.

MGen Iiams: Yeah. I don't think there was anything specific that came out as to, hey, this is how you balance it. But the DMF actually came up with a new template that talked about in walkthrough. Hey, let's look through not just what you have to supply to the geo found, but what residual do you have after we look at the IRF and the CRF, those are all taken out. So you brief me your readiness on your ability to accomplish But then let's look at all of the other functional Benn's those. beyond that and tell me what you have. So they should still have that template chart that goes through the left side or all of the which call it kind of the functional requirements. The right hand side was more DRRSish and and OPLANish. And then the IMF actually had a couple of. Okay. And then do you have the capacity to support what additional requirements? And that was kind of the MEF bowl of, okay, if we were asked to do something, what additional capability do we have? So it was I got the feeling through the entire time that it was, hey, we're going to paddle to make our GFM Hammond are our OPLAN level requirements. And then it looked like the MEF commander was going. And then how much do you still have left in the tank? Not that he was

going to utilize it, but he had a, you know, are you completely out of Schlitz or are we pedaling too hard? So kind of getting a feel for where we were in our execution. And then on the right hand side, on the bottom of that chart, if I remember, and it's a classified chart we're kind of the impacts. Hey, where are you short and what do you need to be able to get there? So the way I walked out of those was, hey, you're pedal to get the mission done, but you're not going to break it off. And I think.

LtGen Mundy: Yeah, maybe clarified the, you know,, did you ever have any difficulty understanding, you know,, what the priorities were? So I did dial 15th MEU is going out the door. You are responsible providing a trained, certified ACE to that. You have Sulimani, you know, in the aftermath of Sulimani, was there ever any confusion about where you were supposed to apply your weight of effort?

MGen Iiams: No, there were there absolutely was not until we get to COVID and then I would say during covered it was not because of really lack of guidance. It was just there were so many things going on. And, you know, what is the guiding order? Because there were things beyond the MARFORPAC that we're telling you, you know, you won't do this. You can't do this. The requirements to get on to Macon Island will be this, you know,

for the workup. Okay, I know I needed a MCCRE on the unit, but it's like, well, you can't go out of the local area and it's like, well, okay, I know the priority is actually to get them Vickrey done and the only place we can get it done is out here. So I'm going to waiver this kind of contrary to, you know, the standing order for the COVID stuff and doing our best to mitigate. So I thought we had I felt that we had clear enough guidance as to what was the most important thing to do and how we should be able to get that done. Throughout the period. Just the more confusing. Confusing during COVID.

LtGen Mundy: Right. Okay, thank you. Throughout this investigation, we've heard concerns about the force generation model. Did you have any concerns or do you have any concerns with, you know, the way that we do that specifically as they apply to personnel and training readiness for your deploying squadrons and attachments?

MGen Iiams: I did when I first started, sir, when I first got into command, we were putting out units that were barely ready and just in time. So and I think that was just the investments that we had been making in the readiness accounts were hurting us there and we were just getting into the readiness recovery. So we're putting a lot of money in there. And it just

wasn't showing for wishing that it was. I thought it was gonna take us a while to get there and it finally did so. But there was no there's, no, slacking up on the GFM that we were continuing to to deploy special purpose MAGTF. Everything else was still going on time. But then the money actually started to have effect. So probably by the end of 20 is where we actually caught up. And the deploying units were, you know, T-1, T-2, now not just like a T-3, maybe T-2 now they were T-1, T-2 prior to chop and we were actually working our way up in garrison to beyond that. And by the end of 20 we were actually T-1, T-2 in garrison in total for deployers and non deployers. So that that was helping us. But then we're looking at forced design, so we're looking at taking items off the table. But the GFM never stops. So the concern becomes, as with everything that we have to do for EOTG, you know, Cal Fire, all of the other requirements and then the whitespace that remains for the training, the whitespace it remains to do your teahan, our training is the first thing that kind of overflows out of the bucket because everything else is, well, we kind of got to get that done. At least that's perception from the commanders and you have to help them mitigate that and understand that, you know. Okay. Yes, we had some of these things are our operational imperatives, but we

are not going to do anything that we're unprepared for. So encouraging them to be able to talk to us as to why are you sure? What do you still need to do? Do we need to delay do we need to give you priority to get you where you need to be for airplanes, the right Marines and then the right training before we chop you over? But it is a significant challenge with again, UDP special purpose MAGTF have the SOP for a 3rd MAW, although we're only scheduled for certain SLTEs and, you know, certain commitments to W.R WTI because we live where we live, we end up, hey, can you help a brother out so we end up to keep the Marine Corps running on auditing. We end up coming around for the other second, helping from 3rd MAW, which is another lift that we have to get the group commander and the Wing CG level looking go. Can you do this without overstepping your Marines or your airplanes? Yeah.

LtGen Mundy: Do you feel like you or did you feel like you had enough influence to, you know, ensure that the right units were assigned to GFM matters? So you mentioned that, you know, that the GFM didn't stop and yet you're doing force design, divestitures and transitions and all that sort of stuff, along with everything else that you've already laid out. Did you have the ability to say, hey, this unit is not the -- I don't think this unit needs to go and do this particular deployment. We need

to shift it or trade it with this one.

MGen Iiams: It would have been a very calculated, yes, to do that. So I thought about it for 164 and the MAG-39 CO was talking me off of the ledge. And I was predicating that on the lack of aircraft readiness that, again, he showed me that I was wrong on. But, no, I thought that if needed, prior to the other chop, I was ready to make the change and pick another one of the squadrons. And I was already talking to the Mag Sixteen commander about, you know, readiness across his units. And who could we swap in there? At least I was looking at that but did not have to do it. But I felt that if I needed to, I would and I was ready to do so.

LtGen Mundy: Okay. Thanks. Wolfie. And then finally, you know, do you have any concerns that are outside the scope of this investigation? But would you believe the Marine Corps needs to address in any different form.

MGen Iiams: From just the sir? When General Neller asked us a long time ago he would, you know, from all of the general you're one pager on, what do you think we need to do not to change to? And it's just kind of comes back to her. If we're gonna redux, then we need to reduce the operational requirements across the board. We can't adjust and expected to continue to do

just as much as we were doing with less because our commanders don't see it. And what they're gonna see as I still have to do all of these things. And as much as we try to tell them, no, no, no, you know, I expect you to come back to me and tell me that you're only gonna be, you know, 70 percent of what you were before. They're gonna try to get to 100. That's just who we have bred them to be. And sometimes they make mistakes and doing that and they don't see that. No, we really did mean it when we said that, you know, you're going to be at 70 percent. And I would say, you know, saying things like what we're all going to fund you to 80 percent of your readiness. Yeah, we expect everyone to be T-1 and we ask questions why folks aren't T-1. It's okay that, well, you expect me to do more with less. And we end up massaging things inside the MSC to do things like, well, let's focus on the deployers. Deployers will lead first. give them the people, give them the airplanes and we'll take the money that we have. And this is why for 3rd MAW, when I first got there before the readiness had completely built in, is, you know, you harvest out of your non deploying units to make your deploying units, you know, T-1, which means that while the squadron that would have also been, you know, a, you know, a T-3, well, you're going to harvest out of them to make the 21, which

means they're T-4. And so then that makes it that much harder to work up the next unit because they're starting from below ground zero. And, you know, to try to work up. So you do a lot of work. The next one's back. Let's get to get airplanes over here. Let's get the good Marines back over here. So there was a good bit of a shell game now that the red installers have kicked back in and we've spread loaded this, you know, the aggregate readiness level is up. We do less of that but I could see those going down the same path as we had forced design. And we start taking, you know, down to 14 MV-22 squadrons. And that was one of the concerns out of aviation was you take us to 14. That's that we can do that. But that did not take into account all of the white space required for training and the other essentials.

So I'm concerned that, you know, we will eat ourselves again out of the garrison squadrons to be able to produce deployers okay.

LtGen Mundy: Anything else you'd like to add? We'll be.

MGen Iiams: Mesi. If I had any other notes from that level, sir. Not nothing very high level. I'll just say, I think there's there might be some growing social confusion marines on some things. And --

LtGen Mundy: What you mean by that?

MGen Iiams: That just with everything that's going on in th social local media right now, or in the national media, I should say, in an across America, you know, on racial injustice and everything else, I'm sure that is reverberating through the ranks. And we've already seen of it. You know what the focus on extremism and I'd say the probably preponderance of the Marines, you know, workers. Do you think that we are extremists? So it's I think the just making sure that we have a good monitor going forward, that, you know, that we believe in the 95 percent who are doing the right things all the time, every single day. And, you know, it's in the Marine Corps and the command's best interest to, again, pick a good internal look and make sure that, you know, is do we have a 5 percent that we weren't aware of that, you know, are an issue. But the Marines always look at when we do stuff like this and we do a big kind of a hair across the Marine Corps, they're like, did you meet me? So I just worry that there might be a bit of social confusion that we've had some on some issues similar to this before. Right.

LtGen Mundy: I understand that's a good point. So, Wolfie, in terms of supervising, you know. Oh, I love independent O-5 level commands. And here I'm thinking about LADD or VMU-1, you know, was that something that you expected or either formally

assigned or informally assigned to your ADC?

MGen Iiams: No. Zohara goes along various.

LtGen Mundy: Commands.

MGen Iiams: They do. They all fall under 0-6 commands. So and then during this timeframe, I was actually doing all of that coordination direct with the U.S. So you Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6). had already stepped out for his training and was actually p getting ready to PCS because he PTSA early to be able to go to the Queen Elizabeth. So this is me direct to my group commanders for all of this coordination.

LtGen Mundy: You don't.

MGen Iiams: Have.

LtGen Mundy: Any the wing doesn't have.

MGen Iiams: Any incentive.

LtGen Mundy: Oh, O-5 level commands.

MGen Iiams: The only one that would have come close would be BMF 81 or one. And we re outgun that to a witch. Call it a an O-6 command. So is kind of PROMACTA 11, but he's not part of that. Eleven by other training squadron three or three is fully underneath the MAG 39. So no other outliers out there. Right.

LtGen Mundy: Okay, that was I just misunderstood. Or should I had that back. I thought that they might be under six

level commands but. Okay. Thank you very much. So this is

Lieutenant General Mundy concluding the interview.

[The investigative interview closed at 0816, 22 April 2021.]

I, LtGen C. Mundy, attest that the preceding transcript is a

true and accurate verbatim account of the interview of BGen Iiams
held on 22 April 2021.

C. Mundy
LtGen, USMC





Welcome to the Blue Diamond Warfighting Seminar



# Division Commander's Warfighter Conference

## **Briefing Topics and Schedule**

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0815-0830: Schedule Overview (Capt (b)(7)(c) / CG Opening Remarks

    0830-1100: LOE #1. Deploy and Fight the Division

      0830-0930 — I MEF Plan-to-Plan CENTCOM IPB Update (Maj (b)(7)(c) I MEF G-2 & 1stMarDiv G-2/3)
      0930-1000 - Break/Discussion (30 minutes)
      1000-1100 - Dynamic Force Employment (DFE) w/Intel-focused Primer (G-2/3)
  1100-1200: Lunch
  1200-1330: LOE #2. Generate, Deploy & Redeploy Forces
      1200-1230 - MMEA Retention Update (G-1/CARPLAN/MMEA)
      1230-1300 – JLTV & ACV Updates (LtCol Brenize, Maj (6), (b)(7)(c), & CWO4 Gonzales)
     1300-1330 - Break/Discussion (30 minutes)
 1330-1600: LOE #3. Readiness
     1330-1400 - Corpsman Assault Pack System Policy / SL-3 Baseline Guidance (G-4/DSO)
     1400-1430 - Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS) & MCTIMS (Capt (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) G-3)
     1430-1530 — Gunner's Corner — Equipment/Fielding/SYSCOM (Gunner Marine & Maj (b)(7)(c)
     1530-1600 – Update on COMMSTRAT Support to Maneuver (Maj (6), (b)(7)(c)
1600-1615: CMDMC/SgtMaj Closing Remarks
1615-1630: CG Closing Remarks
1700-2000: Division Social Dinner (Iron Mike's)
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# JLTV Update

- Fielding
  - Behind schedule (2 months) due to "production stop" to repair control arm pins
  - 87 out of 120 vehicles (Sept-Dec) have been fielded to (10) Div units
  - Priority fielding to 15th MEU BLT (V14) and supporting units
  - 29 Palms units fielding delayed until approximately May 2020
- Licensing
  - V14, V24 priority seating for licensing courses. Next Priority V11 and V34
  - Maintenance classes: NSTR
- Interim Contractor Support (ICS)
  - Currently ICS in CPEN only. ICS can travel to 29 Palms upon request but takes a few days due to contract
  - Program Managers Office (PMO) working contract for 29 Palms
  - ICS for MEU: Working the option to have ICS meet MEU when arrives to ports if it has maint issues
  - 1st MarDiv request: attach a JLTV ICS to the MEU while deployed
- Miscellaneous
  - HMMWV trailers authorized with JLTVs
  - PMO is testing some MTVR trailers to use with JLTV (M353, water bull, MCTWS, etc.)
  - HMMWVs are available for cannibalization and SL-3/SL-4 shortfalls
  - CO2 cabin issue
  - Current/future modifications

CLASSIFICATION Unclassified//FOUO



## Corpsmen Assault System (C5332) SL-3 Deficiencies

## **Problem**

- Lack of accountability and feasible sustainment options for Corpsmen Assault System caused multiple CYD submissions exceeding \$250K for SL-3 deficiencies.
- Updated Div CGRI checklist identified a high risk in medical supply readiness.

## **Contributing Factors**

- Battalion Medical Officers as Responsible Officers.
- Units stopped ordering the bags or components via GCSS-MC.

## **Accountability**

## **Current Shortfalls:**

- \$ 2.7M total value of identified SL-3 deficiencies.
- V25 has a pending CYD for \$ 250K (slated for SPMAGTF-CR-CC).
- It costs \$270K for (65) complete new bags per infantry battalion.

## Way-ahead:

- Responsible Officer by Company Cmdrs/RI by platoon Cmdrs/individually issued to corpsmen.
- Medical Officer/Chief validates SL-3 shortage/requisition during quarterly CMR reconciliation.
- Timely, correct and consistent inventory → more frequent and timely replenishment of SL-3s.

## **Sustainment**

## **Background:**

- Units reported long lead-time for GCSS-MC requisitions for C5532s.
- SMU's op code restricted and reject any CL VIII requisitions.

## Way-ahead:

- SMU changed op code on 23 Jan 2020 to pass GCSS-MC req to DLA source of supply.
- V25 purchased (1) complete bag via GCSS-MC on 27 Jan 2020.
- Status on DASF: req was passed to DLA (28 Jan)
- SL-3 component purchase via GCSS-MC.
- Updated Manual/Policy letter and training via Supply Workshop.

Unclassified//FOUO



# **DRRS-MC Updates**

- Automation of Resource Standards:
  - Resource standard information will be pulled for personnel, training and equipment/supply
  - The resource codes then will provide an automatic fill
  - Authoritative Data Systems: MCTIMS, MCTFS, GCSS-MC
- Baseline and Advanced Standards:
  - The MET assessment page will be updated so that more of the data is automated for the user and the standards will be split into two sets, one for Baseline standards and one for Advanced standards
- Standards Based Assessment:
  - The MET Assessment shall have a Calculated MET Assessment and a Commander's Subjective Assessment and will display both values prominently

# UPDATE #1: U.S. MARINE CORPS DISEASE CONTAINMENT PREPAREDNESS PLANNING GUIDANCE FOR 2019 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19); COMMANDERS' RISK-BASED MEASURED RESPONSES

Date Signed: 3/7/2020 | MARADMINS Number: 150/20

MARADMINS: 150/20

R 070130Z MAR 20

MARADMIN 150/20

MSGID/GENADMIN/CMC WASHINGTON DC PP&O//

SUBJ/UPDATE #1: U.S. MARINE CORPS DISEASE CONTAINMENT PREPAREDNESS

PLANNING GUIDANCE FOR 2019 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19); COMMANDERS' RISK-

BASED MEASURED RESPONSES//
REF/A/MSGID: DOC/YMD: 20200211//
REF/B/MSGID: MSG/YMD: 20200225//
REF/C/MSGID: DOC/YMD: 20190328//
REF/D/MSGID: DOC/YMD: 20130807//

REF/E/MSID: JOINT STAFF DOC/YMD: 051908Z Mar 20

NARR/REF A IS MARADMIN 082/20, U.S. MARINE CORPS DISEASE CONTAINMENT PREPAREDNESS PLANNING GUIDANCE FOR 2019 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS. IT INSTRUCTS COMMANDERS AT ALL LEVELS TO TAKE ACTIONS NECESSARY TO REVIEW AND VALIDATE DISEASE CONTAINMENT PLANS AND TAKE PREPARATORY AND PRECAUTIONARY ACTIONS TO ENSURE THE VIRUS DOES NOTINCAPACITATE U.S. MARINE CORPS FORCES WORLDWIDE. REF B IS UNDERSECRETARY OF DEFENSE (PERSONNEL AND READINESS) MEMORANDUM ON FORCE HEALTH PROTECTION (FHP) SUPPLEMENT 2, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE GUIDANCE FOR MILITARY INSTALLATION COMMANDERS' RISK-BASED MEASURED RESPONSES TO THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK. REF C IS DOD INSTRUCTION 6200.03, PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT WITHIN THE DOD. IT PROVIDES AMPLIFYING INFORMATION ON PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES AND FORCE HEALTH PROTECTION CONDITIONS (HPCON). REF D IS MCO 3504.2A, OPERATIONS EVENT

INCIDENT REPORT (OPREP-3) REPORTING REF E IS JOINT STAFF MESSAGE FOR DOD COVID-19 PASSENGER SCREENING GUIDELINES FOR OVERSEAS MILITARY TRANSPORTATION TERMINALS.

POC1/JAMES CARTER/LTCOL/UNIT: PP&L POC/F/TEL: (703) 571-1015/NIPR EMAIL: JAMES.L.CARTER@USMC.MIL//

POC2/HQMC Watch Officer/TEL: (703) 695-5454/NIPR E-MAIL: HQMC.MCC2@USMC.MIL// GENTEXT/REMARKS/1. This MARADMIN provides supplemental, COVID-19 guidance to reference A, by providing a risk-based framework to guide planning, posture, and actions necessary to protect U.S. Marine Corps personnel. It also contains updated reporting instructions. 1.A. Background.

- 1.A.1. Per reference B, the continuing spread of COVID-19 is an increasing Force Health Protection (FHP) threat in regions where DoD personnel live and work. As the leading U.S. government Public Health Agency, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continues to assess the risk of COVID-19 and to provide guidance for those residing in the United States and traveling abroad. Because CDC guidance is principally tailored for persons residing in the continental United States (CONUS), some CDC COVID-19 guidance may have limited applicability for commanders, particularly those outside the United States, and is not recognized by other sovereign nations. While DoD continues to follow CDC's lead, when needed, additional military specific measures are authorized to mitigate-risk to U.S. forces stationed or deployed around the world, and to protect Service members, DoD civilian Employees, family members, and contractor personnel.
- 2. Mission. All commands will take specific actions to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 worldwide and adhere to the reporting instructions contained in this MARADMIN.
- 3. Execution.
- 3.A. Commander's Intent.
- 3.A.1. Purpose. Promulgate CMC level guidance to the force in order to reduce the risk of further exposure or spread of COVID-19.
- 3.A.2. Method. The Commandant has identified COVID-19 as a threat to the health and well-being of the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps will take measured steps to protect all Marines, Sailors, dependents, government civilians, and contract worker personnel. Informed by Office of the Secretary of Defense and Joint Staff guidance and actions, the intent of this message is to protect the force and preserve our capability to accomplish the mission of the Marine Corps. Nothing in this message is intended to supersede guidance and direction from combatant commanders to their assigned or allocated forces.
- 3.A.3. End State. The U.S. Marine Corps is postured to mitigate, contain, respond to, and recover from the effects of this public health challenge, and is capable of continued execution of assigned missions.
- 3.B. Concept of operations. Commanders will institute guidance per this MARADMIN, per reference A, and as updated herein. Commanders will conduct prudent planning and take appropriate action for mitigation activities in the risk-based framework in reference B. Responses to COVID-19 will need to be flexible, tailored, and incremental. Commanders outside the United States must act in accordance with relevant host nation (HN) and allied forces standards, as applicable. Commanders must seek the cooperation of HN authorities to exercise certain public health

emergency authorities granted in reference C within the terms of existing international agreements.

- 3.C. Tasks. Commanders will:
- 3.C.1. Review and comply with tasks outlined in reference A.
- 3.C.2. Official Travel. Effective immediately, all official travel to OCONUS locations that have declared a public health emergency, or for which a travel advisory has been issued by the CDC, shall be reviewed and approved by a Deputy Commandant, a Marine Force Commander or a Commanding General, Marine Expeditionary Force.
- 3.C.3. Review leave and liberty plans to ensure personnel are not traveling to locations that have declared a public health emergency. Leave requests to areas with a declared public health emergency, or for which a travel advisory has been issued by the CDC, will be reviewed and approved by the first general officer in the chain of command.
- 3.C.4. Maximize the conduct of virtual conferences, meetings, and classes to the fullest extent. Conference and other gatherings of personnel from disparate locations must be approved by a Deputy Commandant, a Marine Force Commander, or a Commanding General, Marine Expeditionary Force charged with hosting the conference.
- 3.C.5. Plan and implement telework options to minimize workforce footprint and exposure as required.
- 3.C.6. Identify all Marines returning/redeploying from countries under a CDC travel advisory of level 2 or higher, or who have had close contact with an infected person, and ensure they are screened and monitored for symptoms of COVID-19. Be prepared to place service members under a 14-day restriction of movement (ROM).
- 3.C.6.A. MARFORRES personnel/units impacted by COVID-19 require special considerations when dealing with global force employment, exercise participation, and annual training timelines. ROM for Reserve Component Marines returning from deployments will be planned in conjunction with Marine Forces Command, Marine Forces Reserve and Plans, Policies and Operations Department, HQMC.
- 3.C.7. Be prepared to implement subsequent guidance pertaining to international military student/unit training events, resident school participation, and foreign delegations. Foreign liaison and exchange personnel should adhere to the guidance for official and Marine Corps personal travel contained in this MARADMIN.
- 3.C.8. Overseas Screening: Commanders will adhere to DOD guidance for COVID-19 screening at overseas military transportation terminals per ref E.
- 3.C.9. Review the supplemental risk-based measures outlined in reference B and observe the following operational risk level mitigation actions for COVID-19 outlined below. The risk-based framework for all geographic areas with COVID-19 transmission is organized by the following characteristics: (a) community transmission beginning, (b) increased community transmission, (c) sustained community transmission, and (d) widespread community transmission.
- 3.C.9.A. Low risk level no transmission: imported or no cases. Generally aligns with:
- 3.C.9.A.1. Department of State (DoS) Travel Advisory Level 1.
- 3.C.9.A.2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Travel Advisory Level 1.
- 3.C.9.A.3. Public Health Emergency (PHEM) Health Condition (HPCON) 0/A.
- 3.C.9.A.4. Public health recommendations.
- 3.C.9.A.4.A. Usual precautions:

- 3.C.9.A.4.B. Maintain normal operational posture.
- 3.C.9.A.4.C. Standard hygiene and precautions.
- 3.C.9.A.4.D. Avoid contact with sick people or individuals suspected of virus exposure.
- 3.C.9.B. Moderate risk level focal transmission: cases occurring amongst close contacts. Generally aligns with:
- 3.C.9.B.1. DoS Travel Advisory Level 2.
- 3.C.9.B.2. CDC Travel Advisory Level 2.
- 3.C.9.B.3. PHEM HPCON B.
- 3.C.9.B.4. Public health recommendations:
- 3.C.9.B.4.A. Enhanced precautions, include usual precautions per para
- 3.C.9.A.4.A., plus:
- 3.C.9.B.4.B. FHP brief prior to deploying.
- 3.C.9.B.4.C Strict handwashing: soap and water for at least 20
- seconds (or alcohol based hand sanitizer if soap/water not available).
- 3.C.9.B.4.D. Proper coughing/sneezing etiquette.
- 3.C.9.B.4.E. Social distancing measures (e.g. 6 feet).
- 3.C.9.B.4.F. Avoidance of animals (alive or dead) / animal markets.
- 3.C.9.C. Significant risk level sustained community transmission: cases occurring outside of close contacts. Generally aligns with:
- 3.C.9.C.1. DoS Travel Advisory Level 3.
- 3.C.9.C.2. CDC Travel Advisory Level 2/3.
- 3.C.9.C.3. PHEM HPCON C.
- 3.C.9.C.4. Public health recommendations:
- 3.C.9.C.4.A. Enhanced surveillance/screening, include enhanced precautions per para 3.C.9.B.3, plus:
- 3.C.9.C.4.B. Enhanced screening protocol for all visitors. Daily medical screenings (e.g., temperature, symptoms) for 14 days for returning personnel. If exhibiting fever, cough, or shortness of breath, then mask, isolate and evaluate further with appropriate PPE. Be prepared to place sick individuals into cohorts and evaluate potential close contacts.
- 3.C.9.C.4.C. Enhanced surveillance to include monitoring sick call logs daily for increased influenza-like illness.
- 3.C.9.C.4.D. Enhanced sanitation including disinfecting high contact areas (e.g. common areas, berthing, heads, handrails, door handles) at least daily with approved cleaning/disinfectant agents.
- 3.C.9.C.4.E. Consider non-punitive normal liberty limitations.
- 3.C.9.D. High risk level widespread community transmission: sustained disease transmission despite public health control measures. Generally aligns with:
- 3.C.9.D.1. DoS Travel Advisory Level 4.
- 3.C.9.D.2. CDC Travel Advisory Level 3.
- 3.C.9.D.3. PHEM HPCON D.
- 3.C.9.D.4. Public health recommendation.
- 3.C.9.D.4.A. Appropriate restriction of movement:
- 3.C.9.D.4.B. Cancel non-mission essential travel.
- 3.C.9.D.4.C. Essential personnel travel only with appropriate PPE.

- 3.C.9.D.4.D. Personnel should not return to home station without 14-day guarantine.
- 3.C.9.D.4.E. Consider non-punitive normal liberty restrictions.
- 3.D. Coordinating instructions.
- 3.D.1. Reporting Instructions. All commands shall submit reports as directed in the most current Service FragO to the MCO 6220.2 issued by HQMC PP&O, Operations Division, in accordance with reference D. Commands requiring clarification of reporting requirements shall contact the Marine Corps Operations Center.
- 3.D.2. MARFORs will continue to meet Geographical Combatant Commander reporting requirements and will provide an info copy to the Marine Corps Operations Center.
- 3.D.3. Guidance contained in reference B can be retrieved from the DOD Coronavirus Response website at: https:(slash)(slash)media.defense.gov/2020/FEB/26/2002255006/-1/-1/1/force-health-protection-supplement-2.pdf.
- 3.D.4. CDC travel health notices and geographic region information can be retrieved from: https: (slash)(slash)wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices#travel-notice-definitions.
- 3.D.5. DoS regional travel advisory levels and descriptions can be retrieved from: https:(slash) (slash)travel.state.gov/content/travel/entraveladvisories/traveladvisories.html/.
- 3.D.6. Definitions.
- 3.D.6.A. Quarantine: Separates and restricts the movement of people who were exposed to a contagious disease to prevent transmission to others.
- 3.D.6.B. Isolation: Separates sick people with a contagious disease from people who are not sick.
- 3.D.6.C. COVID-19 outbreak: Location(s) where the cognizant military commander has implemented Health Protection Condition (HPCON) B, C, or D and other locations where moderate health protection measures have been implemented because of an increased community transmission.
- 4. Administration and Logistics. This MARADMIN has been coordinated with HQMC, Health Services Preventive Medicine, HQMC Judge Advocate Division, HQMC Operations Division, and HQMC Security Division.
- 5. Command and Signal.
- 5.A. Command. This MARADMIN applies to the Total Force.
- 5.B. Signal. This MARADMIN is effective upon release.
- 6. This message is approved for release by LtGen G. W. Smith, Jr. Deputy Commandant, Plans, Policies, and Operations.//

#### PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

The Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps (ACMC) appointed me to conduct a command investigation into the facts and circumstances surrounding the forming of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) associated with an assault amphibious vehicle (AAV) mishap that occurred off of San Clemente Island on 30 July 2020.

Specifically, the ACMC directed I investigate the facts and circumstances surrounding:

- 1) formation 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.

The ACMC also 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.

#### **ANSWERS TO IO'S INTERROGATORIES**

1. What is your name, rank and current billet?

MajGen Robert F. Castellvi Inspector General of the Marine Corps

2. What was your billet on 30 July 2020? What specific dates did you hold this billet? Briefly describe your duties and responsibilities in that billet.

Commanding General, 1st Marine Division, from 6 July 2018 to 23 September 2020

3. Are there any other significant events for which 1st Marine Division was preparing or in which 1st Marine Division was involved from 1 January to 30 July 2020?

The majority of I MEF's planning/execution efforts included direct planning and participation by 1st Marine Division. In addition to the list provided with this question, below is a more inclusive list:

- Planning to provide forces in support of contingency responses to the Soleimani strike/Iranian retaliation in January 2020 (two infantry battalions, one truck platoon, one combat engineer platoon);
- Planning for and participation in MEFEX-20 (Division headquarters)
- Support to the Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force (SPMAGTF)-Customs and Border Protection mission (one infantry battalion every six weeks);
- Security force support to the USNS Mercy;
- Participation in Exercise IRON FIST with Japanese Ground Self Defense Forces;
- Support to newly-established COVID quarantine facilities for deploying and redeploying units;

- Preparation for and execution of Exercise NATIVE FURY-20, including planning for cancellation and/or modification;
- Cancellation of WTI 2-20;
- Cancellation of ITX 3-20, including units dropping from participation in the training;
- Preparation for and providing forces for ITX 5-20 (to replace ITX 3-20)
- Force generation for requirements for Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) and Central Command (CENTCOM), to include preparation for Unit Deployment Program (UDP)/Marine Rotational Force-Darwin (MRF-D), SPMAGTF-Crisis Response-Central Command (SPMAGTF-CR-CC), and 31st MEU
- Precautions and changing guidance related to COVID-19;
- Planning support to and providing forces for TF Ellis and TF Koa Moana;
- Planning and executing Force Design divestitures and unit organizational changes (e.g., 1st Tanks divestment).
- Key Staff Transitions; Chief of Staff; G-3; G-6, G-7, SJA, Surgeon. Internal to the G-3, G-3, G-3 AirO/Deputy, G-3 COPSO. Internal to the G-6: G-6, G-6 Deputy.
- (10) Subordinate unit changes of command (1/11, 2/11, 3<sup>rd</sup> LAR, 3<sup>rd</sup> AA Bn, 1<sup>st</sup> CEB, HQBN, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Regiment, 11<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, V27, V15).
- Modifications and tracking of personnel due to COVID restrictions/precautions, to include PCS, PCA, Schools, deployments and normal leave/liberty.
- Billeting for the 31<sup>st</sup> MEU Boat Company to conduct EWTGPac small boat training in Coronado, CA.
- Development/Implementation of an All Domain Reconnaissance capability for the MEF/Division.
- Standup of an Information Operations Cell on the Division Staff.

# 4. How did the events described above affect the manpower, training and materiel readiness of 1st Marine Division from 1 January to 30 July 2020?

When viewed in isolation, the events from 1 January to 30 July 2020 did not adversely affect or over-stress the 1st Marine Division headquarters. However, taken together, those events – and the staff bandwidth required to support them – were significant for the Division headquarters. Contingency planning and the unforeseen and unprecedented pandemic, the difficulties of which were just coming into focus during the beginning of that time frame, and its second and thirdorder effects inserted additional friction into an already high-optempo environment. The 1st Marine Division staff table of organization and actual manning levels do not produce the same personnel capacity, i.e., number of action officers, as the I MEF command element. The result was a Division staff where action officers and key staff members were many hats and had to cover down on numerous planning efforts simultaneously, and even more so as the summer turnover and PCS season approached. The challenges with COVID mitigation and constantly evolving guidance and policy actions exacerbated the matter. More specifically, it was incredibly challenging to reconcile our requirement to remain ready for any contingency while simultaneously dealing with the internal and external friction generated by COVID, shifting ROM/quarantine definitions and requirements, delayed GFM deployment/redeployment windows, and all of the attendant variables associated with those, not to mention the unknown extent of the virus on personnel and their families. That said, while stressed, there was a great sense of teamwork and pride, and I never got a sense that the staff and commanders were not

meeting and balancing the many competing requirements, nor did I ever hear any concerns from the I MEF CG. We were all in it together, dealing with uncertainty through consistent and unpredictable changes, modifications, cancellation and/or rescheduling of events, exercises and activities throughout the period; reactive posture due to the lack of timely and clear guidance on COVID precautions/restrictions; conflicting and different COVID requirements/measures per COCOM, per MARFOR, per Service, and per our own Higher Headquarters, to include ROM, GO level certification of COVID ROM, ROM duration, local/base restrictions and tracking mechanisms.

# 5. Describe your priorities for 1st Marine Division for the period of 1 January to 30 July 2020. Specifically, in establishing your priorities how did you balance global force management (current) readiness with operational plan (future) readiness?

My priorities stayed consistent with the 1st Marine Division Campaign Plan and my Command Philosophy/Commanders Guidance, which I know you have access to. MCO readiness and support to GFM were the two key LOEs, with a Readiness (cross-cutting) LOE that had all the man, train, and equip tasks to set conditions for successful execution of the two mission-essential LOEs. There was a constant command emphasis on balanced, sustained readiness across the Division. Once COVID hit, it was all about salvaging training and readiness opportunities lost to COVID mitigation, determining/adjusting to COVID restrictions/precautions to Deploy/Redeploy forces, successfully deploy/redeploy forces, and train and maintain readiness. However, there were episodic, emergent requirements which materialized that had the effect of spreading thin an already heavily engaged Division headquarters. Specifically, the warning order to provide forces following the Soleimani strike/Iranian missile retaliation, as well as the requirement to provide forces in support of the USNS Mercy security force mission added to the Division headquarters' tempo and workload, but it was not unmanageable. In addition to my regular battle rhythm monthly office calls with my O-6 and separate O-5 commanders and their monthly SITREPs to me, I chaired monthly "Commanders SVTCs," where each O-6 and separate O-5 commander briefed me and my staff in detail on current/future training and operations, retention efforts, and readiness levels. My subordinate commanders were proven leaders; I trusted them to keep me informed and had no reason to doubt the information they provided in their monthly calls and SITREPs. These efforts combined with the monthly DRRS and MRB enabled me to keep a pulse on the Division's overall readiness.

# 6. Near the end of 2019 and from January to July of 2020, what were the most significant challenges for 1st Marine Division?

Please see the answers provided to Questions 4 and 5, above. I'll reemphasize that from February to July, it was overcoming the uncertainty associated with COVID precautions/restrictions, supporting the planning and activities for I MEF COVID mitigation, and generating additional capabilities to support COVID requirements. All the while, supporting and attempting to salvage the training and readiness opportunities impacted by the pandemic. Initially, as with a number of staffs, we had limited capacity to conduct collaborative planning across the staff. Due to COVID, limitations on remote access, and the restrictions associated with numbers of personnel allowed in rooms, meetings and buildings, the staff had to find alternate secure means to discuss operations and planning.

## 7. How did you address those challenges and mitigate risks associated with those challenges?

One of my overarching pieces of guidance, which I reinforced with my commanders and staff throughout my time in command, was the absolute imperative that we take nothing for granted. This applied across all three of 1st Marine Division's lines of effort. This was equally applicable for the challenges associated with training and protecting the force throughout the COVID crisis. The climate within 1st Marine Division was one where subordinate commanders were trusted to carry out mission-type orders, and with that came my clear expectation that my subordinate commanders embraced the responsibility associated with their command positions. Simply put, I encouraged my subordinate commanders to assess risks, allocate resources, and make informed decisions based on my commander's intent. Inherent in that was the responsibility of my commanders to communicate their concerns to me when they arose. I emphasized constant communication with the Div Staff and subordinate commanders to ensure information/changes were understood and opportunities for overcoming challenges worked through.

#### 8. How did you communicate those challenges and risks to I MEF?

There was constant coordination with the I MEF CG and other MSC Commanders through Battle Rhythm events, as well as staff to staff coordination and integration into I MEF planning processes where Div Staff capacity enabled integration, although Div Staff did not have the capacity to consistently support all MEF planning activities full time. I participated in weekly, MSC/MSE Commanders SVTCs with the I MEF CG; the audience included all three MSC commanders, MIG and the MEU commanders, MEF DCG, MEF CoS, and MEF G-3. This regular touchpoint provided me the opportunity to update the I MEF CG on the Division's current and future operations, as well as any concerns I might have as the Division CG. I provided the MEF CG with a monthly detailed SITREP, and participated and contributed to the I MEF Quarterly Ops Summit and Quarterly Force Preservation Board. Once COVID took hold, I participated by SVTC in the daily I MEF COVID Commanders Update. This daily (and eventually weekly) event was another forum where I could convey any concerns about the impact COVID mitigation was having on the Division.

# 9. What were the I MEF and 1st Marine Division policies regarding COVID mitigation and how were those policies communicated to subordinate units?

Division policies were in sync with I MEF/MCI-West policies. COVID policies/restrictions were centralized, and in constant change throughout the period as the DOD, Service and others began to develop the situation, publish guidance and refine that guidance. Overall, it was a dynamic and consistently changing landscape related to policies and restrictions for COVID. Policy promulgation was reactive as the Service waited for DOD guidance, and the MEF waited for Service and MARFOR guidance to develop the situation and publish updates to its initial draft LOI and FRAGO (I MEF Disease containment preparedness and planning guidance for COVID 19). 1st Marine Division provided planners to support I MEF's COVID OPT, which met on a daily basis and generated a continuous stream of FRAGOs to address the constantly evolving guidance, policies, and updates emanating from HQMC. To make sense of this at our

level, I directed the formation of a Division-level COVID cross-functional team (CFT), which also met on a daily basis. The COVID CFT translated the I MEF COVID FRAGOs into Division FRAGOs to publish to our forces. The commanders in the Division dialed into the daily COVID SVTCs, and they were afforded the opportunity to address their concerns to me during that forum.

# 10. What specific impacts did COVID policies have on training and materiel readiness in 1st Marine Division from January to July 2020? What actions did you take or direct to mitigate the impact?

From a training and materiel readiness perspective, and in order to maintain our operational readiness to deploy, we strived to continue mission essential training within the constraints directed by higher headquarters, e.g., enforcement of mask wearing, social distancing, and limiting personal actions outside of work (i.e., no unnecessary movement out in town beyond home, work, and essential errands). It challenged the Division's commanders at every level and made simple things harder. The most readily apparent impact was the ROM requirements, which really put a strain on facilities and manpower down in the regiments and battalions. Certainly, there were impacts from a training and readiness standpoint as large scale exercises, and training/readiness events were curtailed, to include the postponement, modification and/or cancellation of all events during the month of April, to include WTI, ITX, Ex. Joint Warrior, AFX, Peru SME, Ex. STEEL KNIGHT planning, FSMAOs, Force Sync Conference, and we had to postpone some CGIs, LREs. All SLTEs were cancelled and AITB shut down a number of key courses. Throughput through UET training was appreciably and regularly curtailed because of one thing or another; a pool issue or a COVID issue. This was uncharted territory as we had no way of knowing when, or if, facilities would reopen which naturally negatively impacted training. We did get some relief with the 31st MEU Spring GFM turnover delayed by several weeks (which would have received UET seat priority). G-3 Training closely monitored and helped de-conflict and re-prioritize units when necessary. I used the daily COVID SVTC to MEF to raise a number of these concerns and enhance awareness.

# 11. How did you assess training and materiel readiness in 1st Marine Division and communicate your assessments to the MEF Commander?

Please see the answers provided to Questions 5, 7, and 8, above.

# 12. Were you aware that neither V14 nor the AAV Platoon had completed their required swim qualifications or underwater egress training (UET) prior to CHOP to the 15th MEU? If so, how did 1st Marine Division respond?

Based on my understanding of the 8 January 2021 Command Investigation, this question appears to misstate the relevant findings of fact. Despite this I do not recall being informed that neither unit had completed the training prior to the CHOP. I received a D-270 brief from V14 during the first week of February 2020, and the training numbers they provided at the time were on par for that point in the battalion's PTP workup. This is/was not an uncommon occurrence due to availability of the SWET pool and balancing the requirement for the 31st MEU BLTs. Visibility of these challenges was recognized at all levels to include the MEF. Additionally, this was

slightly compounded by the early CHOP of the 15th MEU. This has always been accounted for in the MEU workups and BLTs continue to complete these requirements to develop proficiency/meet training requirements all the way to E-Day. Hence, the MEU PTP. I would have received a D-180 brief to the Division, and another opportunity to assess progress, but 15th MEU's/I MEF's desire for an early chop obviated the requirement for the D-180 Division brief, i.e., by the time the D-180 threshold came, V14 was OPCON to 15th MEU and they assumed ownership as part of their PTP. In the matter of the incomplete swim qualifications and UET qualifications, I do not recall either the V14 commander or the 3d AA Bn commander alerting me that this was a concern or raised by the MEU or MEF as a concern. Neither commander ever raised concerns to me about meeting a specific training milestone, nor was the issue raised at the 15th MEU 270/240 by the MEU or the MEF. That said, there was common understanding that we were in a COVID environment where throughput through training facilities was curtailed, be it rifle ranges, pools, AITB courses, or training requiring contractor support. Historically, there were nearly always throughput concerns for the UET (specifically the helo dunker) at each predeployment brief. In each case, our G-3 would work with the briefing commander to assist in obtaining training seats, and the G-3 shop would weigh in with either I MEF or the UET facility itself to reprioritize training seats as necessary. The UET facility shut down several times in the spring due to COVID outbreaks, and any training deficiencies ought to have been factored into the BLT's and MEU PTP, post-CHOP.

13. Were you aware that 3d AAV Battalion was noncompliant for two Logistical Readiness Evaluations (LRE) in July 2019 and June 2020 and was assessed with six findings of risk during a Field Supply and Maintenance Analysis Office (FSMAO) inspection in September 2019? If so, how did 1st Marine Division respond?

From what I recall based on the briefs I reviewed, I believe it was a FSMAO in July of 2019 and a LRE in June 2020. I received every LRE and FSMAO outbrief. The stats provided in this question do not correctly reflect that only about half the units pass the LRE, and that it is designed to be intentionally much harder, with the idea of making the quiz (LRE) more difficult than the actual test (FSMAO). That concept paid off as our FSMAO performance Division-wide greatly improved. As for how the 1st Marine Division responded, our LRE/MRB would have worked with 3d AA Bn, as they did with any unit coming out of a LRE or FSMAO with medium/high risk or non-compliant functional areas, and offer an LRE-assist slot on the calendar and help with developing its corrective action plan. LRE findings were briefed at the Division-level with root cause and remediation provided by the command and oversight by the G-4 and LRE team.

14. 1st Marine Division did not provide a battalion landing team (BLT) for a traditional West Coast MEU between the 11th MEU that composited in May 2019 and the 15th MEU that composited in April 2020. Did you sense a lack of institutional "muscle memory" or other causes or concerns either within the Division or MEF due to that gap?

Not really, at least not at or within the Division, but that's because of our sourcing to the 31st MEU and repetitions we were able to get through exercises like IRON FIST and ISLAND FURY and getting more amphibious play into our annual STEEL KNIGHT exercise. With the sourcing of 31st MEU and the previous 11th MEU and 13th MEU before that, 1st and 5th Marines had at

least two battalions whose previous deployment was as a BLT, and 11th Marines and the separate battalions had similar slices of probably at least a third with recent amphib experience. That said, I think the 15th MEU focused more staff capacity toward some unique capabilities they requested/required, to include the Division sourcing HIMARs, an All Domain Reconnaissance capability, and company-level small boats/small boat expertise within the BLT.

## 15. Describe your guidance and direction to subordinate commanders in forming a BLT to composite with MEUs, particularly 15th MEU.

I encouraged DIRLAUTH from the start and my guidance was to ensure complete transparency with the 15th MEU concerning capabilities and readiness, and to come back to me if the MEU raised concerns or desired new capabilities, like additional CRRCs, HIMARS. There was a significant desire by 15th MEU and I MEF to operationalize EABO concepts for the upcoming deployment. This included an initiative by 15th MEU to acquire combat rubber raiding craft (CRRCs) in support of a rejuvenated small boat company capability, as well as acquiring rigid hull inflatable boats (RHIBs) and crewmembers to support the nascent All-Domain Reconnaissance (ADR) capability generated by 1st Reconnaissance Battalion. The Division was prepared to support the CHOP process and work closely with the MEU and the MEF in their requests for additional resources.

# 16. What, if any, challenges were you aware of related to forming BLT 1/4 and forming the AAV platoon for the 15th MEU?

When we received the requirement to support the USNS Mercy SECFOR mission, we aligned V14 to this mission in late March because V14 was the most ready and was currently filling the Alert Battalion Task Force (ABTF) requirement prior to its chop to 15th MEU. During V14's planning and execution of this mission, I never heard any concerns from the V14 commander about any negative impacts the short-duration Mercy SECFOR mission might have on V14's eventual chop to 15th MEU. To be clear, the Mercy SECFOR mission (like the southwest border support mission) called for a battalion, but in this case only had to employ a slice of the unit at any given time. The battalion was able to continue simultaneous training at Camp Pendleton during this COVID support mission.

In previous months, the 3d AA Bn commander executed his plan to reorganize his battalion in an effort to better service his GFM requirements, and in the process, enhance readiness as a whole. 3d AA Bn was the most D2D stressed unit in the Division with a sub-2:1 D2D and a company taken off line to transition to ACV. The platoon which 3d AA Bn had aligned to chop to 15th MEU had deployed in support of Native Fury-20, and did quite well, although when COVID took hold, there were challenges redeploying the Native Fury force in a timely fashion. However, I do not recall any concerns raised by the 3d AA Bn commander that the AAV platoon would not be ready in time to CHOP to 15th MEU or not meet its MEU PTP requirements with BLT 1/4.

Other challenges were sourcing of the HIMARs capability and the impact to other GFM and readiness requirements; sourcing of additional CRRCs to support the BLT small boat capability.

The Division's CRRCs were used to support to the training of the BLT for the 31st MEU and training/operations for 1st Recon Bn. There were no additional boats available.

# 17. During the E-270, E-240, and E-211 briefs for the 15th MEU, did your subordinate commanders provide you with the level of detailed discussion, accompanying corrective action plans, and judgment you would have expected?

Division's pre deployment briefs are detailed and include a round table forum for the Subordinate Commands and their staffs to discuss the entirety of risks, opportunities and challenges associated with forming, training and deploying, and I believe I received all of that information from V14 at D-270. At the I MEF D-270/15th MEU composite brief, the V14 commander commented that 1st Marine Division had been actively engaged to man, train, and equip his battalion landing team. He noted that, from a DRRS perspective, V14 was a "No" in Amphibious Operations due to a lack of amphibious shipping during the PTP... something we were all acutely aware of during the previous year. He also noted that his BLT enablers (of which the AAV platoon was one) were projected to be trained and qualified by the time the chop to 15th MEU occurred. Based on the information provided to me, this seemed feasible.

At that same brief, the AAV commander noted that, from a DRRS perspective, they were "trained but not evaluated," and that they had had a "Native Fury-driven" PTP. He also noted that the AAV platoon was at a S1/R2 readiness rating, and he anticipated an extended timeline to complete the required joint limited technical inspections (JLTIs) due to the challenges associated with manpower attached to Native Fury. He underscored this by saying that the AAV platoon's redeployment from Native Fury back to 3d AA Bn would drive the chop to 15th MEU. I was not, and would not have been, alarmed with anything I saw at that brief. No commander raised any concerns to me or, to my knowledge, my staff, and there were no issues with V14 or their AAV platoon raised by the MEF or MEU.

The only key issues for the Division highlighted during the 15th MEU D-211 brief were 15th MEU's desire to procure RHIBs and CRRCs, as well as a desire for personnel (not equipment) from 1st Tank Battalion to deploy. There were no other concerns brought to my attention after this brief.

# 18. What was I MEF's and 1st Marine Division's policies on units completing a Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation (MCCRE) prior to a MEU composite?

1st Marine Division had a Division order that required units to conduct a MCCRE prior to chop. In the case of separate battalions such as 3d AA Bn, the battalion commanders would be responsible for evaluating their subordinate units. That said, as a way to leverage resources and training areas, and the efficient use of time, the Division order encouraged units to conduct MCCREs during large-scale training exercises (such as SLTEs, e.g., ITX, MTX, etc.), or a combination of events. The order also encouraged attachments/enablers to participate in the MCCRE of the unit for which they would deploy in support. Ideally, the AAV platoon would have conducted its MCCRE with V14 when V14 conducted its MCCRE at ITX 2-20. However, the AAV platoon was deployed to Native Fury at that time. Although I do not recall being specifically briefed on the AAV platoon getting a MCCRE, I probably would not have been that

concerned for various reasons. Notably, with the deployment to Native Fury, and the premier training opportunity it offered, where according to Col Clark they performed well, and the platoon's participation with the designated BLT Mech Company in the EOTG raid package right after CHOP, coupled with the crawl/walk/run nature of the MEU PTP as it executed its workup to deploy, I would have thought the platoon was well on track to meet the readiness standards expected by the BLT and the MEU. Again, never was a concern raised by the BLT, MEU, or the MEF prior to or after taking ownership for their PTP and readiness.

## 19. What was your assessment of 3d AAB Battalion and BLT 1/4?

This question is incredibly vague. Despite that objection, generally I thought highly of both battalions; they were both very different, with unique strengths, as well as challenges to overcome. My assessment of each battalion is better taken as a snapshot in time when I reviewed the FITREPs of the two commanders, which I would think they could provide to you, and probably have, through their counsel.

# 20. What were the effects of leadership gaps in the Assistant Division Commander (ADC) and 1st Marine Regiment positions? How did you address those gaps?

The CO of 1st Marines was either deployed to Native Fury (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) for most of the Jan-Jul period in question. I addressed the gap the only way I could afford to at the time, with his XO stepping up as necessary. The effect was more work for me and my staff to provide overwatch of 1st Marines and their battalions. As for the ADC gap, it was covered by the Chief of Staff, the same way I was forced to do when I held the billet ten years ago. The ADC traditionally serves as a "directed telescope" for the Division Commander and, in the case of the separate O-5 battalions, as an intermediate level of supervision and scrutiny between them and the Commanding General. The unfortunate side effect was that the gapped billet compelled my chief of staff and G-3 to cover down frequently on the separate battalions when I was unavailable to do so. Fortunately, I was blessed with strong officers in both positions who performed very well.

## 21. What changes to Division and/or MEF policies or staff practices do you recommend?

I am not in a position to provide any recommendations at this time.

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

(Witness Signature and Date)

[The investigative interview was called to order at 0701,

15 April 2021.]

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

[WIT: Col

[IO: Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)

[IO: Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)

[IO: LtCol (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)

[CR: SSgt (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)

IO (Col $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}$ ): Colonel  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}$  my name is Colonel  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}$ 

. I'm part of a team reviewing the facts and circumstances surrounding the formation of the 15th MEU and actions and decisions associated with the material conditioning, training, and personal readiness thereof.

Interviewing along with me is Colonel colonel

This investigation is associated with the assault amphibious vehicle mishap that occurred off San Clemente Island on 30 July 2020. We're not conducting a second investigation the incident itself, but rather investigating from an institutional perspective to determine any changes that may be required or actions that could or should have been implemented prior to the accident.

The Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, General

Thomas, appointed Lieutenant General Mundy on 2 April 2021, to conduct this investigation, which includes, among other things, interviewing personnel from different organizations with information relevant to the investigation.

We have two copies of the convening order that assigns General Mundy and assigns members of the team for your review, if you would like.

WIT: Okay. Thank you.

IO (Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) ): The Staff Director of the Marine Corps,
Major General Olson, appointed me to the investigation team on
8 April 21. I should say, appointed us. And we are talking to
you in our investigatory capacity as a representative of
Lieutenant General Mundy and General Thomas. We are required to
provide General Thomas with a written report upon the completion
of our investigation.

We're talking with you because the investigation team believes you might have information that may be relevant to the investigation.

Some of the topics that we'd like to cover with you today could include formation and compositing of the 15th MEU, training material readiness surrounding the formation and compositing of the 15th MEU, I Marine Expeditionary Force

oversight of the 15th MEU.

And this is an administrative investigation; however, due to the sensitive nature of the ongoing review, we're asking personnel that we talked to as part of this investigation not to share anything we discussed today with any other person.

But before we start, do you have any questions about our role in this investigation?

WIT: No.

IO (Col (c) | : Okay. Thank you. We'll go into some background. Would you please state your name, rank, and current billet?

WIT: (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) colonel, chief of Staff, I MEF.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}_{(c)}$  : And what was your billet on 30 July 2020.

WIT: Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, I MEF.

IO (Col (c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7) : Now we'll get into some of the questions -- and before we do this, we want to get anidea of the context and the environment, the operational environment that was going on within I MEF at that time.

So if you could, in your own words, explain to us what was going on, what was the command experiencing, different influencing factors, everything from GFM to COVID to institutional pressures at the time around July 30, and in the

time leading up to July 30.

WIT: So the entire period in the first half of 2020 -- so I'm talking first of January through the time of the mishap on 30 July was dynamic. That's not uncommon to any Marine Corps unit.

As soon as we returned from the holiday leave period, we were reacting to the Iranian situation after the strike that killed General Soleimani, and we went into contingency response planning for potential plans in CENTCOM. That consumed all of January and into February and became a continuous cycle of maintenance after contingency sourcing a TPFDD for that potential response.

By the end of January, COVID-19 was not just on the horizon, but something for which we were actively planning. And we were dealing with evacuees from Wuhan, China, that were being flown into Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, evacuees off of the cruise ship that had ported up in San Francisco. They were coming into Miramar on the heels of the evacuees from Wuhan, and then into our own planning for COVID-19 response and mitigation for the potential impacts on the MEF, the force itself, and the families and defense support to civil authorities with security detachments for the hospital ship Mercy that deployed up to Los

Angeles, among other things related to COVID-19. And throughout the entire period, COVID-19 was absolutely the wet blanket that wrapped around all of the activities of the MEF. Think of it kind of like operating in a CBRN environment, only you're not really certain about what the impacts will be.

As it related to global force management and deploying forces and recovering forces from anywhere in the world. The quarantine requirements before going out, and the quarantine requirements for forces coming back in was a new item and a significant planning and logistical lift for the MEF that consumed a substantial amount of planner and leader bandwidth. And it changed, as you all have experienced, on about a weekly basis as the whole country and DoD, in particular, tried to contend with the impacts of COVID-19.

In addition to the Iranian crisis response planning, we also deployed forces into the Central Command AOR for exercise

Native Fury, which was an on again, off again thing from the end of 2019 into early 2020. And actually, in conjunction with the Iran crisis response planning, caused us to cancel the MEF-EX that we had been working on from the summer and fall of 2019, intended to execute in early 2020. But we couldn't because we had to prepare the MEB for potential contingency deployment.

So during that entire time frame, we were dealing with the uncertainty of whether we were going to Native Fury or not go in Native Fury. And in the end, we ended up going and in a big way. And that whole deployment or recovery from that deployment was significantly impacted by COVID-19 as well. And was the force going to be able to get out of the Middle East, and then once it did, how we're going to quarantine it and take care of it when it returned here.

Also going on during the same time frame, early in the year, was exercise Iron Fist, the Japanese ground self-defense force deploying approximately a battalion over here to southern California to train amphibious operations. And it was actually the 15th MEU command element that was responsible for leading the execution of that particular exercise.

IO (Col  $^{\text{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}}$ ): When was that exercise?

WIT: Typically, the Japanese arrive in the January time frame, and if my recollection is correct, completed by late February, early March.

So that was, quite frankly, the first large event that the 15th MEU command element team did after forming for this particular cycle.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}_{(c)}$ ): I don't mean to interrupt you, but can we

just dig into this one a little bit?

So when the Japanese ground self-defense force came here to do amphibious operations, partnered with the 15th MEU command element, what major support elements were -- I'm assuming it's 3rd Tracks, but I don't want to assume that. Was 3rd Tracks, involved in that exercise?

WIT: I'd have to pull up the exact task organization for Iron Fist. I can tell you, like so many other things related to how TEEPs get managed and when things come together and the way in which they change, very little of the task organization for Iron Fist included the task organization that eventually became 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit when it composited in April.

For instance, the infantry battalion I know was not the same one. The attachments to the infantry battalion, I'd have to look at the task organization to tell you which were in talking to the MEU commander, when he was serving as the MEF G-37, that was one thing we looked at in particular. In most cases, there was just no way to get to having MSEs and other subordinate units that were eventually going to form with the MEU participate in Iron Fist. We considered it. We strove to do that. It wasn't practical. Certainly a challenge.

IO (Col $^{(b)(3),\,(b)(6),\,(b)(7)}_{(c)}$ ): Certainly a challenge. Okay. I don't

mean to interrupt.

WIT: Yeah. No problem whatsoever. So as the winter wore into the spring and as COVID-19 continued to impact operations. In addition to deploying and recovering forces from global force management requirements, we also addressed the service level training exercise in the ITX and MAGTF warfighting exercise, and WTI in the spring were dramatically impacted by COVID-19. Specifically, were we going be able to do that training at all? And units that were coming from Okinawa in the East Coast ended up being excluded from the exercise because of the challenge of traveling into California during the course of the pandemic.

So I MEF went through a dramatic reconsideration of what forces could actually participate in ITX, and whether or not we would get the approvals from headquarters Marine Corps to proceed with that type of training in the midst of the pandemic. Another significant planning task on short notice in order to allow something to be salvaged from what was the exercise.

We did end up pulling something off eventually, and it was good for the division and the wing in particular, but it was challenging to get to the final solution.

Concurrent with that, 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit was planning its realistic urban training, which was really the

MEU's first opportunity to train together after composite.

Again, because of the pandemic and the limitations on what parts of California off of military bases that we could use, we went from a very robust RUT at many offsite locations to something that was still robust, but was concentrated on the Camp Pendleton area.

Originally, you had intended to go to 29 Palms because of the challenges with getting the service level training exercise off the ground and going, it was revamped to the Camp Pendleton area.

Most of the training was able to be salvaged, but here again, everything that had been planned had to be replanned and relocated in order to in order to create that opportunity for the team to train.

After RUT -- and really the planning for this started before RUT. But after RUT, we get into the progression of training for the at sea periods for the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, which again, required a complete revision of the original schedule, and I'll call it standard, although it's anything but for every MEU, because it has to be tailored, the sequence of three at sea periods that eventually lead to the deployment, in this case, had to be revised due to COVID-19 mitigation.

Also due to, as I recall, updates to the U.S.S. Makin Island in order to make it F-35 capable.

IO  $(Col_{(c)}^{(b)(3),(b)(6),(b)(7)})$ : So what is the timeframe of you're planning environment right now? Are you in May, April?

WIT: Yeah. Thank for asking that question. We're in

January all the way through July timeframe. And I know this

isn't recording the hand motions, but all of this stuff overlaps.

And to the point of each thing that you think you have settled

on, whether it's exercise Native Fury, whether it's Iron Fist,

whether it's service level training exercise, whether it's the

MEU RUT or PMINT or other at sea periods, each of those changes.

And it's common for something to be planned, and then refined prior to execution. But dates shifted significantly in all of these events, decisions came almost always at the last minute on whether we would be able to do them, and by decisions there, I'm talking about service level decisions on whether we're going to be able to do the SLTE compact fleet, so four-star level decisions on Hawaii, on how and when we would be able to do the at sea periods for the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}_{(c)}$ ): Based on COVID mitigation, not on material readiness?

WIT: That's exactly right, based on COVID mitigation. And

the policies for how testing was gonna be done, how long people were gonna be able to be at sea, how we would get positive personnel and close contacts off of the ship, what was going to constitute positive personnel and close contacts, how and where testing capability was going to be sourced, and you may recall testing capability was a significant shortfall at the time.

IO (Col (c)(d)(d),(b)(f),(b)(f)): So if we take what you just described, and focus that prior to 30 July and -- we'll jump forward to PMINT right now. Certainly a lot of mitigation, a lot of planning that goes into how you're going to conduct that. Given some of the constraints imposed upon that training, did you see or feel any additive pressure to get more done during that exercise because this is the timeframe we've got. This is what we planned for, taking into consideration COVID impacts, was there any influence on that on the planning of PMINT?

WIT: So there -- it absolutely did influence the planning of PMINT, but I will tell you that Lieutenant General Osterman; the MEF G-7, Colonel (b)(3),(b)(6),(b); the MEU commander, Colonel Bronzi, we're absolutely explicit about taking things at a pace that accounted for all of the uncertainty imposed by COVID-19 and the planning and mitigation for it and the interaction with the Navy. And the mantraabsolutely was, we are not in a normal place here.

And the things that are of concern should allow anybody to say, Hold on. We're not ready for a training event at that level, and we need to slow down. And anybody could call a time out or a drive a reconsideration of whether we were to do something.

And RUT was actually a pretty good rehearsal of that before we had to to integrate with the Navy. And there were absolutely decisions made throughout the RUT, throughout the Expeditionary Operations Training Group raid packages and leading into PMINT itself about stuff we weren't going to do or we weren't going to do at a certain level because of the assessment of the risk that lost training opportunities from COVID-19 had injected.

Some specific examples relate to the Small Boat Company with 15th MEU, which was something that we were doing for the first time in a while with a West Coast Marine Expeditionary Unit. This battalion had one. Their training down at Expeditionary Warfare Training Group Pacific, had been challenging to pull off because, again, of quartering personnel down at the San Diego area, which we ended up doing on the Marine Corps Recruit Depot.

But in any case, a very, very good example of this is a

normal, slow the pace of the activities and assess at each step of the way whether we're ready to do it, and that carried through the initial training down at EWTG-PAC through the water operations up here at Camp Pendleton during RUT and into the PMINT.

Aviation operations, the same thing. I couldn't tell you exactly how many touches the elements of the ACE had to gain their carrier qualifications and currencies before their first at sea period. But that really was foremost in everybody's mind. When we consider the areas that are highest risk and where we would lose people or cause significant damage to equipment or to ships, aviation operations had our attention in a significant way to make sure that we weren't assuming something and moving forward the way things had been done before, just because that is this way things had been done before.

IO (Col (c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7) ): Now, you bring up an interesting topic and I'll ask your opinion on this. The ACE gets to conduct at sea operations of L-class shipping, they have to do certain amount of touch and goes before they are allowed to go on ship. Let's translate that to the GCE. Do you see any applicability in your experience that, okay, the ACE does this, and they are very formal and deliberate and lived through the pains of trying to

make that happen. Any relevance or applicability in your experience to requiring any of the combat ground element to, for example, tracks, that are waterborne, Okay, you have to do this Navy waterborne operations before you are allowed on L-class shipping? Is there any policies that say that or that dictate that?

WIT: I cannot recall anything off the top of my head that says there has to be this many reps before you -- to obtain a qualification and then to maintain a current qualification.

Whether there is something within the assault amphibian community, I don't know. But I haven't seen anything in the course of this, and I cannot recall having seen it before.

I'll add this to it, when it comes to MEF orders and directives and oversight of specific activities like that, there is a requirement to deliver a certified force that is captured in the directives, and then there is the MSC commanding general prerogatives in delivering a trained and certified organization at composite.

IO (Col (c) ): If we can bring the discussion over to around the compositing timeframe, in your capacity as the MEF G-3, what type of role do you play in the oversight of that compositing function?

WIT: So the expeditionary operations section within the MEF G-35 is responsible for the development of the orders and directives and the scheduling of the briefs leading up to the composite and the deployment of the Marine expeditionary units and the special purpose MAGTFs and all the other purpose filled task forces that the MEF is deploying. Of all of those, the MEUs are probably the most developed in terms of institutional knowledge and the depth of the orders and the inch and half thick packet of MEF task orders, directives, and briefs that go into that, starting over a year or more out and going all the way the brief for the MEF commanding general 30 days before the deployment. Your embarkation minus 365, 240 deployment briefs, in addition to all the other things that come up of the course of a predeployment brief.

So in this case, all of those things occurred, in addition to General Osterman tasking us to look closely at the MAGTF design of the 15th MEU. And we crafted specific guidance from the MAGTF to the 15th MEU based on those disscussions we had with the commanding general. This organization was going to deploy with two LPDs, instead of an LSD, which was unusual and really an opportunity to look toward the future of what amphibious ready group's position was going to be with flight 1

and flight 2 LPDs. Five plus years down the road as the LSDs are phased out.

So in addition to that, so taking the commandant's planning into account, we looked at the future of the force might be like. The need to conduct maritime domain awareness, which goes back to one of the reasons why the 15th MEU had a small boat company. Something we haven't done on a west coast MEU in a while. And also looking at expeditionary operations and how and when a MEU would be able to conduct or contribute to those types of things. And that was actually written into the pre deployment training and during the assessment of C2 X of the 15th MEU.

IO  $(Col_{(c)}^{(b)(3),(b)(6),(b)(7)})$ : So as the G-3 as you're leading up to composite, is that the brief that division gives to MEF saying we're ready.

WIT: The 270 or 240 brief?

WIT: The briefs that lead up to the composite keep the MEF commanding general, DCG, the MEU commander, and the MEF staff informed of where the major subordinate commands and elements are. Typically at each of those the MSC is going to give you a quad chart that talks about command training and equipment and any issues they're encountering in route to delivering a trained and certified unit for the composite.

IO (Col (c) ): So at what point during those briefs, if there was an issue, would MEF or MEU raise a red flag?

WIT: Going back to the issue block. It's not always the commander of the MSC that's presenting in those briefs. Usually it's an operations rep doing so. And if they've got an issue, they will probably bring in a functional expert. If personnel manning is off for one of those, you might hear from the division G-1. If there's some significant material readiness issue, like, a JLTI issue, you might hear from the G-4 or S-4 of the subordinate unit that going to provide the ability to the MEU.

IO (Col $_{(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}$ ): When we look at the MEF LOI --

CR: Sorry, gentlemen. My system just crashed. Give me one minute.

IO  $(Col_{(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)})$ : So what I would be interested to get your thoughts on it, and I'll use a specific example. On the 270

brief, it was indicated that BLT -- that Victor 1/4, at that time, was what 49 percent -- or 54 percent trained on the UET trainer. And on a follow-on brief, I believe it was the E-211 brief that the training numbers had not changed. They had not yet composited.

So my question to you is, at what time or when would something like that training raise a concern with the MEF staff?

WIT: So although I don't remember that specific stat from the 15th MEU progression, it's a common thing in the 11th MEU progression that I've seen, and having served as a regimental commander and providing units to Marine Expeditionary Units and SPMAGTFs, whether it's underwater egress training or other things, training stats don't tend to come into the green until the moment the organization composites or is about to deploy.

And this is regimental commander perspective here, the reason is the personnel manning program doesn't support getting green until that point. So you wouldn't -- how long before a deployment does a typical infantry battalion or another unit have the personnel that it's supposed to have for the deployment? Typically about 180 days out, maybe a little bit earlier or sometimes a little bit later, depending on whether a deployment slid or what time of year you're in and what manpower could

provide.

So taking a SPMAGTF or MEU, for example, at 270 days out, the conversation goes like this: We've got our stats aren't where we want them to be, nor can they be because we don't have the appropriate personnel, but Division or the MAW or the MLG will say, but we're monitoring that and we're gonna be able to get in the green by the time that the organization composites or in time to meet the theater entry requirements for the deployment.

IO (Col (c) ): So let's fast forward to composite date.

And we look at the number of individuals that we have trained in the egress trainer, for example. Is that now a concern? You're MEF LOI said, these people will be trained prior to composite.

In that brief, is there a section where the BLT commander says, I'm not trained in here, but this is my plan to get trained prior to X level event? Did that happen?

WIT: So not at the MEF level. The division has a quad chart in that brief, and if that was an issue that the Division had, that's where I would expect it to be raised. Going back to having participated in briefs at the division level as a regimental commander, that's where the battalion commander would be in the room reporting on the status of his organization and

challenges that he had encountered or things that had not been completed during the PTP.

IO  $(Col_{(c)}^{(b)(3),(b)(6),(b)(7)})$ : So at composite was there any red flags raised that caused you any concern?

WIT: At composite -- at a composite brief, no. Were there things that were going on within the 15th MEU that still needed to be cleaned up at composite, like other units that had formed, yes.

And AAVs are an example. There were a AAV deadlining issues when this organization was composited. There -- they failed JLTI or JLTIs were underway and they didn't look good. I recall talking to the MEU commander, and I recall calling the Division G-3 and saying, Are you tracking that we got a problem, and talking to the MEF G-4, are you tracking that we've got a problem. The answer in both cases was, We're on it.

And like we've done in other cases, we now have to get this squared away and provide a plan and deliver a capability.

So in the case of the AAV platoon for the 15th MEU, yes, there was awareness that vehicles needed repairs in order to be able to conduct EOTG raid packages, and then be ready for the realistic urban training.

And between the colonels on the MEF staff and the

Division staff, we worked through that and getting AAVs in the shape that they needed to be to conduct operations for the -- with the BLT.

WIT: So at the MEF level, I've seen one Marine expeditionary unit composite, that was the 15th MEU. And as the chief of staff, I've now seen the 11th MEU composite -- I take that back, two -- the 11th MEU being the second one that recently formed. As a regimental commander having provided two battalions to Marine expeditionary units, I saw it from that perspective.

I can't talk to the specifics of this on the 15th MEU because I was not tracking it specifically as the G-3. As a regimental commander, I can tell you that getting the ship time

to actually get touches with LPDs and LSDs and LHAs was hit or miss. And when we were looking at how we integrated our infantry battalions and their mech companies with AAV platoons, whether it was the one they were gonna deploy with on the MEU, or another one just to get them shipboard time, in the two circumstances of battalions in 5th Marines that I recall, we simply weren't able to do it. We were not able to get our mech companies on AAV and on ship at any time before they composited with a MEU.

When we did our combat readiness evaluations for the infantry battalions, we strove to get the AAV platoon that was going to deploy with that BLT linked up with the battalion for the MCCREE. We couldn't always do it, and we always strove to get a ship or two for the MCCREE. We were never successful in doing that over my tour as the regimental commander.

We also strove to do shore to shore amphibious operations as part of the combat readiness evaluations using LCUs and LCACs from the assault craft units, one and five. Sometimes we could, sometimes we could not. And we strove to do shore to shore, AAV water operations, which I think we did in one case of the two that I recall, and we were not able to do on another. And none of those were disqualifying aspects of preparing the units to composite or to deploy. They were things that were

briefed out when we updated the Division.

IO (Col (c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7) : Thank you for that. When I refer to touch and gos like the ACE, I don't mean the tracks getting on ship, I mean the AAVs with a contingent of Marines in the back getting experience in the water.

Can I tap into your experience as a regimental commander one more time?

WIT: Sure.

IO (Col (c) ): As you prepared your BLTs for the MEUs, how did you view or what guidance would you give to your battalion commander -- for mech company operations with tracks? Would you expect them, prior to composite, to be in the water with those tracks, trained, have their safety briefs, and be operating proficiently in the water as part of that mechanized team?

WIT: Absolutely tasked to find the opportunities where we could align TEEPs. And that was not only a task of the battalion commanders to visit all of the units that were going to provide capabilities to their battalion landing teams, that was also a task to the regimental operations officer to work the TEEP to try to align units.

Typically speaking, everybody was working on their

individual tasks in their small unit collective tasks to be ready to do something like conduct training as a battalion landing team, even on a limited scale. So if it came together, it was during a combat readiness evaluation, if at all, or during an integrated training exercise. And it may or may not have been with the specific unit, which was eventually going to form the battalion landing team that was headed to 31st MEU or West Coast MEU. Because TEEPs just did not align in a way that that allowed that to happen before composite.

IO (Col(c) ): Okay. So the integration is a challenge. Your thoughts or expectations of a AAV platoon that is attaching to your mech company, what are your thoughts on that? Is there a standard? Do you expect them to be trained in their core METS when they come and take your Marines and put them in the tracks. Is that a reasonable expectation?

WIT: I'll say, no. But I'll caveat that. I don't expect them to be training complete in their core METS because they're dealing with the same personnel challenges that the infantry battalion is dealing with. I expect it to be complete in their core METS when the BLT composites. Let's take a 31st MEU, for instance. That doesn't happen until people are about 30 days prior to flying into Okinawa.

And in the case of a MEU composite, that typically doesn't happen until about 30 days or so before the MEU composites. So I'm going to take any training opportunity I can get prior to that. But they're not going to be core MET complete, which means just like the training operations within the infantry battalion, you're taking things at a crawl, walk, run pace, and you're briefing and rehearsing accordingly.

IO (Col (c) ): Fair point. Thank you. Thanks for clarifying that. I'm going to ask my colleagues. Are their any questions you may have?

IO (Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (7)(c) , could you describe the quality of your relationship with the MSE G-3s and 15th MEU commander and his staff, specifically as it relates to forming and compositing the MEU?

As you spoke of earlier, plenty of things are going on in the MEF, and when I was here during that time period, the MEF was incredibly dynamic, as I would characterize it. But, you know, your relationship with  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)}_{(7)(c)}$ , and  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)}_{(7)(c)}$  and  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}_{(7)(c)}$  How would you characterize?

WIT: I'd say we had a really good cooperative relationship that was transparent in terms of what was going on, and we ask difficult questions and checked each other when somebody needed

something or when you perceived that there was a blind spot.

So it was actually  $^{(b)(3),\;(b)(6),\;(b)(7)(c)}$ ,  $^{\text{(b)(3), (b)(6)}}_{\text{(b)(7)(c)}}$  , who was the MAW (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)G-3 at the time. at the Division, although A.J. Monroe was in from time to time as the acting G-3, while  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6),}_{(b)(7)(c)}$  was doing things like the commander's program. And then, of course, (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) . at the MLG. And at the 15th MEU team, as they came together in the November, December 2019 timeframe and rolled into Iron Fist, Chris Bronzi, the CO;  $^{\text{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}}$ , the XO; and, (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , the operations officer, and I'll expand that into Expeditionary Operations Training Group, and  $^{\text{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}}$ and his team as well. There was a -- in my estimate, a tight cooperative relationship there.

To give you an idea, how often did I talk to the MSC G-3s daily on the things that came up daily, and then every Monday through Thursday, I had a sequence of scheduled calls that worked through the MAW on Monday, the MLG on Tuesday, the Division on Wednesday, and the MIG S-3 on Thursday. And although every one of those calls didn't happen every single week, that was planned time for us to focus on integration items between the between the MEF and each of those MSCs. I did not have scheduled calls like that with the MEU S-3s, and most of them MEU S-3 interaction was with the G-35 in expeditionary ops section, but I

still had touches with the MEU S-3 trying to --

So for example, as 15th MEU as forming and we're getting ready for Iron Fist, that was a recurring topic of preparation in addition to their actual composite which came later. The 11th MEU, which had just returned from deployment in Thanksgiving in 2019, we're working with them all the time because they were doing a number of additional planning tasks for us related to Iran crisis response and an exercise, Native Fury.

So I'm starting to ramble. But getting back to your point about the relationship with the rest of the ops teams, I think it's pretty close.

IO (Col (b)(7)(c) ): That makes sense. Thanks. But based on your experience as regimental commander, as a 3, as a chief, everything else you've done in the Marine Corps, and again, understanding that what was going on in January to July '20, was pretty unique time in the Marine Corps. Would you say that the MEF was task saturated because, to use your term, "COVID wet blanket," and all the other things that were coming up? And what was the commander's intent, stated intent, as far as balancing GFM requirements with OPLAN readiness? So how would you characterize all that?

WIT: So I would characterize the example that General

Osterman set just by his physical demeanor and also the things that he said were, Let's not blow this out of proportion. Let's do the appropriate things to understand the problem and implement mitigation measures that make sense based on what we know now and understanding that it's probably going to change. And it did. And translating the guidance that was coming in from everywhere that frequently conflicted. It did cause a lot of work and it consumed a lot of time. But I do think there was a balanced approach to it within the MEF.

So the pace was absolutely frenetic, but it wasn't like chaos reigned within the organization. That wasn't the situation at all.

You know, that said, between January and April, I personally worked every single Saturday, full days, and most Sundays during that time frame because the task bucket was full. And the amount of things that needed to be coordinated, and then executed was at the absolute limit of the staff in the major subordinate commands to take in or to take on board and to do. And consequently, there were some things that we had to decide we're not going to do that because it's lower on the priority list and we can come back to it later.

And in each case there, the CG's guidance was clear.

Identify that and tell the people that need to know that we're not going to do whatever that thing is.

IO (Col (b)(7)(c) ): Yeah. That that makes sense. Thank you.

We spoke of MCCREs earlier on and there's Headquarters Marine

Corps guidance on it -- The Division has an order, MEF documents

referred to it often, and there is some contradictory information

there. I think there is phrase there about "independently

deploying organizations in the Marine Corps Order," which can be

a bit confusing. I've never heard that phrase before.

That said, do you think that there's a level base of what's required from the MSCs as far as like, Okay, who's getting a MCCRE? What exactly is the requirement? I mean, the squadrons and battalions, that's fairly clear in the order, but everything below that. Do you think there's a clear intent from MSC or the MEF commander on what the expectation is?

WIT: I think it's clear that everybody needs to be evaluated and that a major subordinate command, commanding general, has to certify that that evaluation is being complete to the MEF CG upon composite or before deployment of an organization, depending on whether we're talking about a MEU or an SPMAGTF or a UDP, or something like that. So, yeah, is that expectation clear at that level? Absolutely.

Could somebody who's navigating the vast array of orders and directives for the first time draw different conclusions? I could see how that would happen. Should they be asking questions about the interpretation of the orders and directives? Yeah, absolutely. And that's where judgment and application comes into play, and that's where continuous communication within the chain of command and among the staffs is necessary to pull it all off.

And I would also say, because, like, you're looking at these documents as well, and we've done a significant relook at things since the AAV mishap and Headquarters Marine Corps is doing the same, and I think that's part of this effort as well.

I perceived that year after year as a new question got asked or a new requirement came up, something got added to a reference or a document. Let's take the MEU LOI or the MEU task order for the MEF, which is that thick. It's comprehensive, but you have to get inside of the document, and you have to read it thoroughly, and you do have to think about it. And sometimes you have to come back and ask a question about a specific situation to get to the right answer.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6),}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ ): And based on your experience,  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6),}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ , here and other places, do you think -- well, let me back up for a

second. On both coasts, we don't generate as many MEUs as we did, perhaps. Before OEF and OIF, specifically in the West Coast, I think there is a gap of almost a year from the time the previous MEU came back, and then the 15th MEU launched. On the MEF staff and even down to the MSC and subordinate's staffs, do you think there's a gap knowledge of, Hey, we used to do this just as a matter of course, and now our institutional capabilities, particularly of staff planning may be a bit degraded specifically for a MEU.

WIT: There is no doubt in my mind that there is less institutional knowledge than there was 25 years ago. I feel that at the MEF level, and because of the less frequent generation and deployment of these types of organizations, and I go back to the regimental command example to describe to you how things have changed over time. In 1995 to 1998, as a lieutenant in 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, that regiment sourced BLTs to the 31st MEU on a predictable cycle, and everybody knew the drill because that's all that organization did. And at the time, 7th Marines did UDP and 1st Marines did West Coast Marine expeditionary units.

Returning to the regiment in 2017 to assume command, everybody did everything. And of four battalions in 5th Marines,

just over the first year, one did a 31st MEU, one did a 15th MEU, one did a UDP to Okinawa, and then by the time that year ended, we were designated our first unit that was gonna do an SPMAGTF CRCC deployment to Central Command.

And we got top notch Marines, officer and enlisted, who are identifying their problem and planning through it, but it's almost like it's the first time every time. And there are advantages to keeping Marines interested in switching from one type of deployment to another type of deployment and mixing it up. But that that does take away an advantage of knowing what's coming and leveraging the experience from the last cycle to build momentum and — to retain situation awareness and build momentum into the next cycle.

And it was -- that was a challenge for the regimental staff as well. Which way are we going today? There's four different directions and a vast breadth of requirements that we have to understand. And then, we have to set the conditions to prepare our subordinate units to to succeed in those missions that they've been assigned. And at the time, pile on top of that infantry regimental headquarters rotating through the SPMAGTF, CRCC command elements and leaving a, you know, a third of a regimental headquarters to deal with all those kind of tasks

while the core of the headquarters went forward to CENTCOM with the commander. That was challenging.

And there have been other circumstances within the whole Marine Corps and within the MEF specifically that have added to that challenge. And I know you experienced one of them.

Let's send units to the Southwest border. To do what? Okay. That's not exactly a core MET or even an assignment that we are accustomed to getting. And by the way, Southwest border is yet another thing that was going on throughout the first half of 2020.

And by that time, we had that drill worked out. So it wasn't a major distracter from time and decision making bandwidth, but it was another thing to contend with that was outside of the norm of force generation and available training time for units to focus on core METS to get ready for a MEU or for an SPMAGTF or something like that.

Again, I've ranged broadly, but does that answer your question?

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6)}$ ): No, it does,  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6)}$ . I'm familiar with the force management summit and the force sync conference. In your role -- previous role as the 5th Marines commander, G-3, chief of staff, how would you characterize the MEF's ability to select

who's going where at the battalion, squadron, and even down to the company level? I mean, does it exist or is the MEF --

WIT: Are you talking about assigning units or assigning personnel into units?

IO (Col (b)(7)(c) ): Assigning units for specific tasks whether it's UDP, 31st MEU, 15 MEU, Special Purpose MAGTF? Does that even exist at the battalion, squadron level, or are you kind of shoehorned into this is the only available unit?

WIT: Exactly. This is the only available unit. And there are too many requirements for the forces that are available and too little time in which to prepare them in the way that we would prefer to do, which doesn't mean we can't meet mission requirements. But as new things get added, Southwest border, defense support to civil authority, as deployment timelines shift for Marine expeditionary units because a ship is not available and you now slid, or the Bonhomme Richard burns to the waterline, and you now slide a deployment requirement several months. You go through an entire TEEP reshuffle that takes whatever well-laid plan you had, upends it. Requires you to redo it. You do -- could build the best result that you can, but it's probably never been any different since 1775. But that pressure is absolutely felt right now, and it impacts your ability to match the right

unit to the right organization.

Force design and the deactivation of commands across the Marine Corps, which will only increase has added to that tension. And, yes, it's been tank battalion and law enforcement battalion that have been divested so far, but now we're also getting into VMMs, and we're getting into other units capabilities that reduce capacity.

So our very robust and useful service level training exercise program is a giant consumer of units and the timing of SLTEs and the scope of available units to source all the requirements within them, doesn't line up with the GFM cycle. So people are hitting SLTEs when they haven't completed core METS, or at a time when you would prefer that they would be focused on unit training to get cohesion in preparation for compositing with a MEU or something like that.

So again, too many requirements for the available units in time that are to do things the way that we would probably really prefer.

IO  $(\text{Col}^{(b)(3),(b)(6)}_{(b)(7)(c)})$ : Yeah. Now, you mentioned something that answered my other question about force design requirements. Okay. Thank you.

Lieutenant Colonel  $\binom{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)}{(7)(c)}$ ?

IO (LtCol (5)(3).(b)(6).(b)): Sir, I just have a couple of questions, and you've spoken about them. I just wanted to talk, specifically, about the MEF LOI for pre-deployment and that mirrors pretty much the Marine Corps order pre-deployments.

Those timelines in there are set.

But you spoke to the fact that it's really not realistic that at E minus 270 or 240 or 211, 204, for the 15th MEU in this case, it was -- it's really unrealistic that the units from the division all show up as a completely formed and trained unit, and then with all of the gear and condition code alpha.

So I'm just -- you know, do you feel that that's something that, you know, is systemic in your experience? I mean, obviously, I'm on the West Coast that we should probably, you know, recommend a change to the Marine Corps order with regard to the timelines, or is that something you think that has been increased in recent months or years due to all of the things that we just talked about, GFM and all the COVID and everything else that's been going on?

WIT: Yeah. So I -- you used the word "unrealistic." I'll say it's extremely challenging for many of the reasons that we just described. And it's the many distracters that make it

really challenging to deliver the unit on time with all of its core METS training complete and with all of its equipment in condition code alpha. That's just a fact of the matter. It's hard to do.

And, you know, I'm living in the world of a year as the G-3 and now sometimes as the chief of staff to have this perspective on it. Maybe if you go back ten years or 20 years, every MEF G-3 and every chief of staff over that period of time would tell you the same thing, right? This is not easy stuff to do, but that's what we prepare to do and that's what we're getting paid to do. So I don't -- there's no woe is me or woe is us in any of this. This is our mission. And we're required to do it. Very challenging. Absolutely.

Are there some things we could do better in order to help us do that? Yes. And it's always less tasks. Yeah. What's the main thing?

IO (LtCol $_{(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)}$ ): Right.

WIT: We do need more of a degree make the main thing the main thing and limit the distractors, particularly on colonel and lieutenant colonel commanders. You know, the MEF staff. Sure. It's a big robust organization with a lot of experience. We can go a bunch of different directions, but we've got to -- we've got

I'm talking about down to the battalion and squadron level. And the predictability in time and in TEEP is probably the best way to do that. And it's the in-year changes that really make it hard when you whiplash subordinate units around, whether it's a tour on the Southwest border, whether it's -- whether it's a MEU sail date slips because of a ship, whether it's a dynamic force employment requirement that pops up, you know, employing a squadron on the immediate response force. Those are the things that just really throw a wrench into the entire cycle.

And exacerbating the whole problem is the units simply aren't manned until the point when manpower can deliver that capability.

IO (LtCol (7)(c) Yes, sir.

WIT: And, you know, if there's a thing -- and I've fought this for a long time, if there's a thing the Marine Corps could do to to help a lieutenant colonel or colonel commander deliver a trained unit on time, it's deliver Marines to that unit with their MOS skill progression training for grade and their PME for grade complete. Particularly among staff NCOs, we are so far off in doing that, it is hurting our ability to train and hurting our ability to deliver ready forces, particularly when they're in

alert windows as part of the directed readiness tables for the immediate response force or for the contingency response force. And this goes back to regimental commander experience, but certainly seeing it from the MEF G-3 and the MEF chief of staff perspective as well.

When you get a staff sergeant or a gunny or even a captain for that matter, who's not MOS skill progression training complete and not PME complete, how good is he or she to you from the beginning? There's risk there, and in some cases, you're almost better off continuing to gap it with somebody who's well familiar with the unit. And you're still gonna have to give that person up to go to there to go to their PME. So they're gonna be competitive for promotion further on down the road or to get into the infantry unit leaders course, you know, to have a fully capable platoon sergeant come back to to an infantry platoon.

And that that hurts organizations because you constantly have gaps in key leadership at the staff NCO and company grade level. And they are the people who should be training and mentoring the most junior members of the command. And those absences even in small numbers have an outsized effect on a unit's ability to progress in its core and eventually assigned METS. Probably off the course for what you're looking

for. I'll stop there.

IO (LtCol $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)}$ ): I mean, I think that is key to it, getting the people at the right place at the right time in order to be fully trained that completely makes sense.

And the other question I had, sir, we've seen the E-240 -- 270, 240, and the 211 briefs. What we can't tell actually what was talked about in the brief. We don't have a good understanding of who sits -- these big deal briefs with the general or the DCG that sit in there and all of the principal G shops, or is this a more of a -- it doesn't seem like to be an informal brief, but I just want ask the question, I guess.

WIT: 365 and 270 typically go to the MEF deputy commanding general with representatives, usually, the G-3's from the major subordinate commands presenting the brief and the MEU commander in the room as well. And the deputy commanding general is tasked by the CG with responsibility for activities on the waterfront, integration with the fleet, partnership with Expeditionary Strike Group-3, and daily supervision of the Marine Expeditionary Unit commanders. So that that is a well established relationship. And the DCG is the officer who takes most of those briefs.

The composite brief for 15th MEU in particular, if I recall correctly, was attended by the MEF Commanding General with

the MSC Commanding Generals in attendance, which is much like what I remember as a special purpose MAGTF commander getting ready to go to CENTCOM, where Lieutenant General Craparotta chaired that meeting in the MSC Commanding Generals participated. And that's where they tell the MEF Commander, that, yes, our organizations are ready to deploy or are ready to take composite into this Marine expeditionary unit.

IO (LtCol (7)(c) ): Do you recall in the compositing brief, sir, that there was specifically talking about the AAV attachment that they were listed as trained, but not evaluated? Do remember that raising any red flags or uncomfortable conversations?

WIT: I do not recall that raising red flags or uncomfortable conversations at the time.

IO (LtCol (b)(3),(b)(6),(b)): Okay. And, sir, I just had one last question, just coming from kind of an East Coast MEU background and seeing the way that EOTG is. I mean, they're like ticks on the MEU there, just all over the place, all the time from pre-chop going forward. I'm just wondering if you could give some insight as to what it's like here. If EOTG is used as a directed telescope for the deputy or the commanding general, or if it's more of a, you know, we sit back and evaluate commander does what a commander does. But I'm just kind of an OIC that

evaluates, if you give some kind of perspective.

WIT: Yeah. I think there's a collaborative and cooperative relationship across the MEF staff. So it's not a gotcha thing with the members of the Expeditionary Operations Training Group, training and and evaluating the whatever MAGTF or whatever task force they're preparing. Because it's MEU, SPMAGTFs, and the Task Force Koa Moana and Task Force Ellis and other folks that we're sending into the Pacific and other places around the world, okay?

So that said, yeah, I think it's a cooperative relationship, and I know that the deputy Commanding General and the director of the Expeditionary Operations Training Group talked on a regular basis, still talk on a regular basis. The MEF G-35 and the DCG talk from an expo-ops perspective about MEU and other MAGTF training forming on a regular basis.

In the case of 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit in particular, and given the COVID circumstances that caused us to evaluate -- Cause us to examine very closely how we were gonna do things like EOTG raid courses and RUT. We spent a lot of time as a team talking about how we were gonna do that and how we were going to get training value out of the venues and the time that was available.

You know, and as a -- for example, I actually do have one very close touch point on that as the G-3, because I was real curious how RUT went. And Colonel Bronzi and I talked on a pretty regular basis, and he invited me out to the last event of the RUT, which was the maritime raid forces raid, which was conducted at the old Naval Hospital at Camp Pendleton over by Lake O'Neil and the outer cordon for that particular mission was Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, the mech company for the MEU.

So throughout the course the RUT, there hadn't been a mission profile that included Bravo Company up to that point, and they were included so that they would get a repetition. And I remember showing up that evening talking to the -- talking to Lieutenant Colonel (b)(7)(c) from EOTG OpsO also, kind of, gave us all the overview of what's going to happen that night. And spending the rest of the evening with him, you commander, and that team. And talking broadly about how the RUT was going, which was assessed even though we had to change the venue to Camp Pendleton. This is going better than we had expected it to, and also how the units were doing.

Which was, all things considered, all of the units, to include Bravo Company mentioned specifically, were doing well.

And I do recall in particular the company commander at the time coming in for some praise of, yeah,  $Captain_{(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)}$ , has his team organized, and this company is on track.

So it doesn't get into any specifics about what training was or was not done, but that's a general observation that was offered on that evening over at the old Naval Hospital.

IO (LtCol (5)(3).(b)(6).(b)): Sir, it triggered just one more question that. I recognize that was the first MEU that you saw as a G-3, but was there any discussion about, while this PMINT that the 15th MEU is going to do, it's aggressive. I mean, normally, and the Marine Corps order puts out there, you know, this is kind of your first time to get on ship to conduct real integration with the Navy, and they were doing full mission profiles.

And I've spoken to other MEU OpsOs and stuff, and they say, Well, yeah, on the West Coast, this is how we do a PMINT.

We do a lot of full mission profiles.

Is that, in your experience -- was there any talk about this being an exceptionally aggressive PMINT that you recall?

WIT: I do not recall a discussion of it being exceptionally aggressive PMINT. In fact, I would say -- yeah, that didn't come up at all.

The biggest concern that I recall about it was: Number

one, making sure that we keep in mind the things that we haven't done going into this, and we don't exceed our training; and, secondly, because we were only going to get two at sea periods for 15th MEU, the PMINT, and then the combined ARG MEUEX and COMPTUEX, the criticality of PMINT to validating the organization for embarkation and assignment to shipping was pretty high on everybody's mind, in terms of level of awareness and things to get to.

IO  $(Col_{(c)}^{(b)(3),(b)(6),(b)(7)})$ : You just mentioned only two at sea periods. Three is the norm, correct?

WIT: Three is the norm.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3),\,(b)(6),\,(b)(7)}_{(c)}$ ): And can you concisely explain why they're only two?

WIT: Two reasons. Number one was *U.S.S. Makin Island's* modifications to be able to accept F-35s, and when she had to be available for maintenance in order to ensure that the nonskid on the flight deck was resurfaced appropriately. And there was something else in her AIMD -- there was some other mod that had to take place below decks for which she had to return to the yard. And I've got that information somewhere.

But in any case, the availability of the folks who met and the berth were that were those modifications and that work

had to be done was a contributing factor to consolidating the at sea periods, and the COVID mitigation, as I recall, was also a factor in that.

So those were all things that we're feeding into the five different COAs for what, 15th MEU's at sea periods we're going to look like.

IO (Col (b)(3). (b)(6). (b)(7)): Okay. That's very helpful. Can I ask a PMINT specific question. Specific to the mech raid, specific to Bravo Company, 1/4's Marines embarking on tracks without being completely UET, which you very eloquently explained that you can't always do it within the time constraints. All training can't always be completed.

In that case, MEF had a waiver policy that can be delegated down to the O-5 level, per event, that says, okay, I've got Marines that are going on this track that aren't UET trained, given the circumstances, given the necessity of the training, I'm granting this waiver.

Do you recall if that waiver was granted during PMINT for those Marines in Bravo Company, 1/4, who were untrained in the UET trainer?

WIT: I do not recall a waiver being granted, and I do recall that on literally the day of the incident, one of the

first questions was, Okay, pull all the records, look at the individual training of the Marines involved.

So there was absolutely an assumption that Marines who would embark for amphibious operations had received the appropriate underwater egress training. Because the exceptions are for things like a reconnaissance team that has to be recovered from the beach or another — another traveler with a particular MOS skill that they hadn't had the opportunity during the PTP to work with the mech company or the helo company or the boat company.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3),\,(b)(6),\,(b)(7)}_{(c)}$  : Thank you. Very helpful. One last question along that.

WIT: Well, actually, I mean, let me add something to that as well, because you brought up earlier that -- maybe you didn't bring it up earlier, but it was on my mind that capacity at the underwater egress trainer is always a challenge, going back to the regimental command experience.

Okay. Who has priority at the UET? Because we're never gonna get everybody we want through that at the time we want to get them through that. And that was a thing to be to be managed on a pretty regular basis and the facility is old. So from time to time, it's down for maintenance, and I know there

[The investigative interview commenced on 1004, 14 April 2021.]

[WIT: Colonel (7)(c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)

[IO: Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)

[IO: Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) ]

[CR: Staff Sergeant (7)(c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)

IO (Col (c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) (c) along with Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) (c) (c) (d) (d) (d) (d)(6), (d)(7)(c) (e) (d)(7)(c) (e) (e)(7)(c) (e)(7)(e)

We are not conducting the second investigation of the incident itself, but rather investigating from an institutional perspective to determine any changes that may be required or any actions that could or should have been implemented prior to the accident. The Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Thomas, appointed Lieutenant General Mundy on 2 April 2021 to conduct this investigation, which includes, among other things, interviewing personnel from different organizations with information relevant to the investigation. And we've got copies

of the convening order in front of you for your references as necessary. The Staff Director of the Marine Corps, Major General Olson, appointed us to investigate -- to the investigation team on 8 April 21. And I'm talking to you in my investigatory capacity as a representative of Lieutenant General Mundy and General Thomas.

We are required to provide General Thomas a written report upon completion of our investigation. We're talking with you today because the investigation team believes you might have information that may be relevant to the investigation. It's important to us to understand the aspects of G-3 and what's relevant to you to inform us of anything you believe should be considered in this review.

The topics that we'll cover today include, one, the formation and composition of the 15th MEU, two, training and material readiness surrounding the formation and composition of the 15th MEU and, three, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force and Division oversight of the 15th MEU. This is an administrative investigation; however, due to the sensitive nature of ongoing review, we are asking personnel we talk to, as part of the investigation, not to share anything we discussed today with any other person.

So before we start, do you have any questions about our role in the investigation?

WIT: I do not.

IO (Col (c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7) : We're just gonna gather a little bit of the background. Can you please state your name, rank, and current billet?

WIT: My name is Colonel (b)(3),(b)(6),(b)(7)(c) . I'm currently the Commanding Officer for Headquarters Battalion, 1st Marine Division.

IO (Col $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}$ : And, Colonel $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)}$ , on 30 July 2020, what was your billet?

WIT: On 30 July 2020, I was still the -- 30 July 2020, I was the Assistant Chief of Staff G-3, 1st Marine Division. And I would note that was the final week that I was in that job, I was in the process of conducting turnover with Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) the former commander for Headquarters Battalion. My change of command was the following week.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}$ ): Now, what we're gonna do is we've got --we've kind of outlined a number of questions that are related to the three areas that we discussed earlier. We'll start out just asking a question, but we'll let the investigation go where it wants to go.  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6)}$ , you want me to hand it over to you for the

initial questions?

IO (Col (b)(7)(c) : So, as you know, Seth, I was out here during the same time. So can you talk to us about your impressions of the command environment within Division and Division to Regiment, and your relationship with I MEF. What was the focus of effort during this time, and, specifically, the February, March to July timeframe?

WIT: The command environment within the Division and with the Regiment and subordinate battalions?

IO (Col $_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6)}$ : Yes. And your relationship with the MEF G-3 and the MEF command.

WIT: Starting from -- sorry, from big to small, from top to bottom. Before I was the G-3 at 1st Marine Division, I was the G-37 MAGTF Development Expeditionary Operations officer up at the I MEF command element. I was in that job for approximately one year, so I got to know many, if not most, of the people on I MEF command element, particularly those in the G-3. But definitely all of the assistant chiefs of staff, as well as the Deputy Commanding General, the Commanding General himself. The officer that came in to be the G-3 as I was outbound from the G-37 to the Division the MEF G-3 was Colonel

I've  $known_{(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}$  since I think probably about 2011.

We were in command at the same time. He was with 1st LAR. I was with 3/7, but I've known George for many years, and think very highly of him. And so the majority my direct interface with the MEF staff was with . We typically had weekly VTC or phone calls and conversations to include quarterly MEF G-3 huddles that was chaired by the MEF G-3, included all of the MSC G-3s and other action officers that were associated with that.

So bottom line, there is that -- had -- still have a very good relations working relationship with George Schreffler.

Never any concerns with our interaction. Never any concerns about what the G-3 and the MEF expected the Division. And I don't think he had any concerns or at least none that he ever here highlighted to me.

Working down to the Division level, my assessment was the command climate on the Division staff and the Division Headquarters was extremely good. We had an extremely tight team, one that I had commented on before. And General Castellvi, who was the CG at the time, he had commented several times that it was the best staff he'd ever worked with, ever seen at the Division level. And for a General officer staff, I echo his comments. So I thought it was a very good team all.

The assistant chiefs of staff work extremely well

extremely talented action officers for a G-3 shop that did not have a very deep bench. We had a lot on our plate between the daily running of the Division and then our management of our relationship with our sister major subordinate commands, as well as, our higher headquarters with the MEF. And also are our direct interaction with service headquarters with 2nd MarDiv as the largest GC in the Marine Corps.

My assessment was -- we had -- I, as the assistant chief of staff G-3, I had a similar relationship with a subordinate commanders in the Division. We had a really, like, an unwritten policy that at any time the commanders, whether they were O-6 commanders with separate O-5 battalion commanders, that they had ability to pick up the phone and call me.

I primarily worked through my action officers in the G-3 and through the S-3's at the Regiment in separate battalion level. And typically -- and what I mean by that is if there was ward I needed to pass or if I needed something or I needed to distribute something or communicate something, I typically went through the regimental and separate battalion S-3's. They were my mirror at our subordinate headquarters. But I always had the ability to go VFR direct with the commanders and they knew they

had the same communication agreement with me. I would field calls from them all the time about anything in training, readiness deployments, etc.

You know, in some of my assessment was it was a very good command climate within the Division very much, and on the Division headquarters very much as a spirit of teamwork and cooperation and quite a bit of camaraderie as well.

IO (Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)): Sounds like you had a great team. I'd just -- as you mentioned, a comment where you had your G-3 bench wasn't that deep. During that timeframe, what were some of the external challenges facing Division?

WIT: Okay, so if I could focus on starting with January of 2020, I can -- if I can talk about the time frame I'll -- actually, I'll take it back one month before that December of 2019 through May -- approximately May of 2020. The bottom line up front really is that the Division had a lot on its plate. I'm also talking to the fact that if everybody had a lot on their plate, everybody always has a lot on their plate.

From the Division's perspective in December of 2019, we execute our annual live fire maneuver exercise a Division level exercise called Exercise Steel Night. It was one in a series of growing exercises each year. The exercise has gotten larger and

larger. And in 2019, the exercise covered real estate across
Southern California, near Camp Pendleton, at 29 Palms at El
Centro, at Yuma proving grounds and then some elements that were
afloat as well. So a significant exercise that took a lot of our
bandwidth in December.

Right after Steel Night in January, there was the kinetic strike on Soleimani. And then right after that was the missile attacks on Erbil and al-Assad. So following the airstrikes on the two bases in Iraq, we got an alert or a warning order from the service and from the MEF. The prepared to deploy forces in support of a contingency plan of following those strikes. So we had to go through the drill of identifying our two most ready infantry battalions and some other enablers. I think there was a truck platoon and an engineer platoon that they were going to contribute to — they were going to contribute forces to a set of deploying forces that I MEF was going to provide this contingency.

So we were doing that planning along with our participation in MEF X 20, which had a similar planning problem set. So in many ways the planning for the two evolutions were real world deployment and for MEF X were similar. So transition from planning for the contingency deployment and to MEF X, and

then we also had exercise Native Fury, which at its core, Native Fury was a NPF offload exercise that the Division was going to do in United Arab Emirates and the Division had the GCE for what amounted to a MEB-. That GCE that the Division was providing was an infantry regimental headquarters that was 1st Marines and the bulk of the GCE was 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, and then there were a series of enablers that to fresh out that battalion, the Regiment GCE.

The size and scope of Native Fury shrank and swell for the entire year in the lead up to the exercise. There were times when we thought it was going be a full MEB. There were times we thought it was gonna be just a regiment and it was as always it was somewhere in between.

And so, the shifting goalposts for what the exercise force was going to look like, it a lot of churn for us on how we got units out the door and we had to cut units at the last minute to get them out the door to be able to get to the exercise, do the offload, and conduct the BILAT training -- Marine only training, and then BILAT training with the Emerates.

Not long after us getting to Native Fury, COVID started becoming an issue and then the second week in March, COVID was declared a pandemic. And so the Division headquarters -- in

really I'd say in response to the emphasis placed on COVID mitigation by the service, by MCI West, and by the MEF, everybody went into overdrive on COVID mitigation. And the term that we used for the COVID mitigation efforts was, "all COVID, all the time." COVID became really the driving force and what we were doing.

So in addition to trying to mitigate the effects of COVID and figure out the policy issues and how that translated down to the operational forces level, how that translated training at the regiment and separate battalion level of -- we also were trying to get our spring GFM cycle out the door to deploy to INDOPACOM and the CENTCOM, as well as, return the units in the GFM cycle from those two combatant commands.

So we had two battalions that we were trying to get out the door and two that we were trying to get back. And that was that led into the March, April timeframe because the spring TFN cycle is typically around April. And then during all of that, we also had the compositing of 15th MEU, which was going to be the first MEU in several years. It's been many months since there's been a composite deployed on amphibious shipping. So that was added to the plate there.

In a nutshell -- and then the last thing from a

training perspective, in addition to trying to figure out the units how to do daily training for their core Mets, we were also struggling with -- because of the effects of COVID, we were struggling with the cancellation of ITX 3-20 and WTI 2-20. And then to mitigate that, we put a lot of effort working with MAGTF TC on building what became ITX 5-20. That was an ITX rotation farther along in the spring to address the missed training opportunity from ITX 3-20s cancellation.

In a nutshell, that those were the major muscle movements that the division was dealing with really between December of 19 and May of 20.

IO (Col (c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)): Good gouge. So you alluded to this, but I'll ask you directly. What was your understanding of the MEF's and your Division commander's balance between OPLAN readiness and GFM readiness? Was one of the two weighted or was it stated that one should be weighted over the other?

WIT: I don't recall that it was ever stated that one should be waited over the other, but there was always the underlying -there was always the undertone or the underlying fact that we had to be ready to do both. We had to be ready to deploy forces in support of this contingency plan, but also we had to -- this is my term not anybody elses, had to pay our annual tax on the GFM

cycle.

There has been no change to the reality that every spring and fall the division deploys about 5000 people spring and fall. It depends on what deployments we're doing. But at the time of the spring 2020 rotation, we had out -- we were deploying a battalion to SPMAGTF CENTCOM. We're deploying a battalion to 31st MEU, and we were deploying a battalion to, specifically, to MRFD. So we had three battalions going out and two coming back, one battalion back from SPMAGTF CENTCOM, one coming back from 31st MEU.

So again, we never specifically stated which had priority over the other, but there was the understanding and the expectation that we had the balance to do both. So the way that we approached that was, you know, we had what we called our waterfall chart, which is essentially was our deployment team or battalions — the infantry battalions, being the pacing items for 1st Marine Division as far as their deployments in the GFM cycle. And our waterfall chart, which laid out the TEEP of the deployment timeline for each battalion, we would periodically have to shift that around based on warning orders about sea deployments specific, which included support to the southwest border where that mission — the MEF gave that mission to 1st

Marine Division the previous year, and it became an enduring mission where the Division was applying an infantry battalion minus to the border for about six weeks at a time. And that became part of battalions of essentially the pre deployment training cycle included a deployment to the southwest border.

But when we were balancing the GFM requirements with contingency plan requirements, each time an emergent requirement came about, for example, one of these contingency requirements or the security force mission for the USNS Mercy up in L.A., when the requirement was registered by the MEF, what we would -- our force -- essentially our force offering would be our most ready battalion.

So in the case of -- in the case of the contingency plan that we were working in January and February when we were initially told two battalions, two battalions we were focused on with the two most ready battalions. One of which had just returned from theater because they were from the same theater. They still had all their people. They were still current in their training. So that's an example.

When we got the requirement from the MEF to fill the SECFOR mission, the battalion that we applied to it was Victor 1/4, because they were currently filling the alert battalion task

force requirement.

IO (Col  $_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6)}$ ): SECFOR mission at the boarder?

WIT: No, the SECFOR mission at USNS Mercy in Los Angeles. Then that was a COVID response deployment.

IO (Col  $_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3),(b)(6)}$ ): What timeframe was that.

WIT: That was in the March, April timeframe. It was just a matter of weeks after COVID was declared a pandemic.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}$ ): Did 1/4 deploy in support of that?

WIT: They did. Not the entire battalion, it was a slice of the battalion. But the understanding we had with the MEF was we are going to apply 14 to that requirement unless they dictate otherwise. Because 1/4 were filling ABTF requirement up until the time they were supposed to chop. Their original chop date was scheduled for April 20 for the 15th MEU.

IO (Col (c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7) ): You know, you mentioned something in there. And when you talked about the 15th MEU, you said it's been a long time since we had composited a MEU. Can you expand on that a little bit. Was it off the regular MEU cycle and why were we off the MEU cyle.

WIT: It was. So the last MEU that we had composited for amphibious shipping was 11th MEU and the BLT from the Division to the source that MEU was V-35. And that was -- let me set my

clock back here. That was approximately -- I want to say they deployed in early 2019. That's the MEU that Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) was the CO for. They returned in the fall of 2019 and they remain composited for 30 plus days after that. I think they decomposed it after the December holiday in 2019.

But -- so as far as the compositing that would mean the division had not composited a BLT for a MEU on amphibious shipping.

IO (Col $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}$ ): About a year?

WIT: Would've been late 2018. That would've been the last time we'd gone through the drill of compositing a -- or building a BLT to provide to the MEU.

IO (Col (b)(3), (b)(6), ): You described some of the challenges with 1/4s training schedule -- or ability to train. Do you think, given all the challenges that battalion had southwest border between the normal period of the Marine Corps or my interjection November, December, we're a lot doesn't go on. Understanding that, I think they went to ITX in January, if I remember right.

WIT: Yes. Their MCCRE was in February of 2020, the battalion MCCRE.

IO (Col $^{(b)(3), (b)(6)}$ ): At the tail end of ITX?

WIT: Yes.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6)}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ ): Okay. Do you think that they had adequate time to train to standard or they were formed and then composited.

WIT: I do. I do. And that includes their deployment to the Southwest border the previous fall I believe. We, at the division level, we had a D minus 270 brief in January, February time frame for Victor 1/4. And there were no concerns that I heard during that brief. There were no concerns by the commander that they were gonna meet their training and readiness benchmarks. And I think actually I was looking at the brief recently. Their stats for the amphibious egress trainer, about 54 percent, which by assessment at D minus 270 is acceptable because that's still 90 days out from chop, minus 180.

So with the Division D minus 270 brief for Victor 1/4, the commander had no concerns and from my read of the brief I had no concerns about their training readiness either. And I would also add that when we got the requirement to fill Mercy SECFOR mission and we notified the CO of 1/4 -- 1st Marines, that 1/4 is going to fill that requirement. I had direct interface with Victor 1/4 CO. Especially in the first 48 hours, he and his Opso we're in my office with me planning out the mission, dialing into conference calls about the mission with the Navy and the MEF, and

Victor 1/4 CO expressed no concerns to me. There was never anything along the lines of this is too much on our plate or that we can't do this. And again, it was not -- we were not applying an entire battalion there. I would have to go back and find the numbers, but it was on the order of maybe several hundred out of his entire battalion. So he had capacity and leadership back at Camp Pendleton and they were cycling people up for the mission. It's the same way that the battalions were doing the mission at the border. The mission in the border didn't require an entire infantry battalion, typically required about four to 500. And so the battalion was able to cycle personnel and companies back and forth between the border and their home station for -- to continue their training and their prep.

But my overarching point there is that from a, you know, from a troop to task and time crunch perspective, I never heard any concerns from the commander. And as a result, I didn't have any concerns.

IO (Col (c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)): On the follow on brief. I think it was like E-211 brief. When you looked at readiness stats for his percentage trained in the underwater egress trainer had not changed from the formation and PTP brief back in February or so. Do you recall if at any point that time he raised the concern

about his ability to meet that requirement?

WIT: I did. The only concerns that we had about the amphibious egress training the as a system between the aviation duncker and the vehicle duncker. The only concerns we had were COVID related. Because what was happening in the March, April, and May timeframe was every time one of the contractors that ran the facility popped for COVID, it they would shut the facility down. And so on several occasions I was alerted by my training officer in G-3 that the facility was shut down because there had been a close contact or a COVID positive case.

So each time they shut it down, there would be -- there would conceivably be cascading effects because it was so it was a facility that the limiting factor is its throughput capacity with so many in time. And it became the training for them became something that had to be coordinated and brokered at the MEF level. And that was something that we actually undertook when I was the G-37.

There was a lot of emphasis on specifically the trainer for aviation because of the requirements for the number of people that needed to be trained to fly over water and because of the throughput concerns and the number of units that needed this training between aviation and the GCE and the LCE the MEF became

the arbiter in that was done in the G-37.

Now that said, each pre deployment brief that we would get from battalions training always came up because of the throughput capacities. And in pretty much every brief, I would tell the commander if you are concerned, if you're having challenges getting the quotas that you need, you need to let me know and I'll engage directly with the MEF or with the facility itself. And then the caveat that I put on that is when you're scheduled to go to the UET, you go to the UET get 50 quotas, you get 100 quotas per day, you fill them in, and you also have to be prepared to fill quotas if quotas come open from other units.

So there was a lot of focus in the G-3 and specifically in G-3 training that I had oversight over on ensuring that we were filling the available quotas for the training.

Yeah, but to your point, the COVID bloom's, it was a challenge. The conversation that I would have my training officer each time was he would tell with the facilities shut down and I would tell it, tell him, okay, what impact is that going to have? And he would say, well, it's going to be in this unit.

Can't go with this unit, can't go and the red lines that I gave him was if it is going to impact units deployability, let me know so I can get involved. And it never reached that level because

the majority of the times that the facility was shut down, it would come back up within a couple of days.

So it just injected a level of unpredictability into the scheduling and some of the trainers.

IO  $(Col_{(c)}^{(b)(3),(b)(6),(b)(7)})$ : But it sounds like you're three shop was very aware of it and very engaged in trying to make it happen.

WIT: Absolutely.

IO (Col (c) ): You mentioned MEF was the arbiter. Did MEF set the prioritization of who goes through and what was MEF's role involvement in ensuring that units that were going to come to the MEF were getting the training they needed in the egress trainer?

WIT: So I don't know the specifics of how they were doing it. You know, who the specific person was but it became -- my understanding was it became essentially like a working group where each MSE would come to the table and say these are the units we have, these are the numbers that we need to go through. The trainer. And the MEF would prioritize -- and then was say, again, this was something that began when I was the 37. The priority always became -- was always deploying units. We had to fly over water in other words, the unit that's going out the door, the next, has the most priority. And then they just had to

balance between the wing, MLG, and the Division.

And I never got the sense as the G-3, the division -- I never got the sense that there was an unfair apportionment or that there was an unfair prioritization. And I never had that sense when I was 37 either. When I was the G-37 and I was dealing with the G-3s that the major subordinate commands, I never had any customer complaints that they just weren't getting what they needed. And if I did then we would, we would prioritize appropriately.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3),\,(b)(6),\,(b)(7)}_{(c)}$ ): So during that time frame --

WIT: Well, I would also add that I can say this from when I was the G-37 and I would extend that really to when I was in G-3 as well, the priority for the UDP was on the helo duncker.

That's really what the priority was. That was the one that everybody had the most concern about flying Marines over water because there had been several mishaps in the previous years.

And so everybody was laser focused on, we have one requirement.

It's to get people through the helo duncker.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}$ ): So in that timeframe -- in that spring timeframe of 2020, you had a battalion getting ready to go out the door for MRFD?

WIT: MRFD, yes.

IO (Col $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}$ ): You had a battalion getting ready to go out the door for UDP?

WIT: MRFD was part of UDP. 2d Battalion was for the 31st MEU.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}$ ): Okay for the 31st MEU. And then you had V-14 getting ready to chop to the 15th MEU?

WIT: And we also had a battalion getting ready to go to SPMAGTF.

IO  $(Col_{(c)}^{(b)(3),(b)(6),(b)(7)})$ : So out of that, who would have had been priority to go to the UET? I'm assuming MRFD?

WIT: Victor 1/4.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3),\,(b)(6),\,(b)(7)}_{(c)}$ ): They would have been the priority?

WIT: Yeah.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}_{(c)}$  : Okay.

WIT: Because MRFD would be all based in Australia. They would have -- well that -- I mean we walked that back the priority would be 31st MEU. It would be V-24 who was going to 31st MEU because they would be aboard amphibious shipping. The second priority would likely be SPMAGTF because of their integration with the ACE in Kuwait and the -- there had been a lot of work done over the previous years of doing BILAT training with the French and with other non-standard amphibious platforms

like the polar where they wanted. They talked about putting a company on the polar or other again, the other non-standard ships.

So there would be a requirement for elements of the SPMAGTF battalion to do it as well. Now, I would have to go back and research it. I'm not sure where the MRFD Battalion would fall in that priority, but my sense is that he would fall lower on the priority because it was gonna — they were gonna be focused in Australia the entire time. Now — and so, Victor 1/4, as they chop, they would — in the lead up to their chop and immediately after the chop, they would assume the highest priority. And in particular because we had not done a MEU in a long time. So there, again, there was a laser focus on we've got to make sure these people are set up correctly.

IO  $(Col_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6)})$ : That said, based on your experience, not just as the G-3 but just prior experience, did you see any strange things going on as far as the forming of the BLT compared to the ones in the past, or was it fairly normal?

WIT: I wouldn't say it's strange. What I would say is -well, there was a lot of energy. This is my perception. There
was a lot of energy at the MEF level for an early chop of 15th
MEU. And that was really driven by the dates of the raid courses

that the EOTG runs and there were other initiatives that the MEF wanted the MEU to do. They were based around EABO.

Then there were other capabilities that 15th MEU wanted that were non-standard, that we were not accustomed to. The first one was HIMARS -- they want HIMARS. That was non-contentious because the writing was on the wall about the role of the HIMARS was going to play with force design 2030. Also we had put HIMARS on an AMPHIB several years before and then a proof of concept fire, HIMARS off of an AMPHIB. So when there was the desire for HIMARS to go on 15th MEU, we were prepared to support that.

There was an interest in bringing tanks on 15th MEU, and when we had the discussion about the 1st Tanks was already going down the road of being decommissioned, the discussion changed to the MEU wanted the tank personnel to go, but not the equipment itself. And -- but the initiative that the MEU wanted that took the most, most oxygen out of the room was the desire by -- the MEU to have CRRCs, combat rubber boats. There'd been a lot of discussion about, you know, all domain reconnaissance force that the 1st Recon Battalion was going to provide -- from the Division was going to provide to 15th MEU and there was a lot of discussion about how to enhance the capabilities of them, to

support EABO, and to try to get after some of the concepts that are in that force design 2030 supported.

So again, those were the issues in the forming of the BLT and the MEU, which had the most attention. I wouldn't -- but to your point of anything strange, the only thing strange I would have thought about because I thought about it frequently was the challenges we we're facing with getting the Native Fury Force back, which Victor 1/4 wasn't part of that. But there was churn associated with that, in addition to the daily friction that we were experiencing with it. And it was daily.

IO (Col (b)(7)(c) ): So do you think the pressure to -- I'll use the term experimental or utilize some feature force capabilities was that, in your opinion, Headquarters Marine Corps or was at MEF or MARFORPAC or all of the above?

WIT: I didn't see -- I did not. There was no perceptible pressure from Headquarters Marine Corps on it. And I don't think pressure is the right word. And there was -- where I think the extreme interest came from was from the MEF command element and from 15th MEU specifically. Again, in the period between when 11th MEU deployed in early 2019, and 15th MEU, we called it the MEU Gap. The period between -- when -- because it was commonly understood back then that when a MEU deploys it's going right to

CENTCOM, that's essentially what happened. You know, with the --but during that MEU gap between 11th MEU and 15th MEU, that was when force design 2030 was announced. That was when the Commandant's planning guidance was announced. And there was a lot of interest and a lot of energy at all levels to start getting after those concepts. I would not classify or consider it pressure. There was genuine interest. You know, how are we going to look at some of these concepts and how are we going to look at some of these future initiatives that or capabilities that don't even exist yet?

And so there was a lot of thinking and talking about how the force, I mean the MEF, the MEU, and even the Division how we could experiment with these concepts with our legacy equipment and our legacy structure. Knowing that it was going to change years out. But it really is going to get after the concepts. So my point in that there during that period of the MEU gap, a lot had happened in the Marine Corps.

There'd been these tectonic plates shifting about the Marine Corps had been here. And then in just a matter of months, the ship was being was steering in another direction. And so in the lead up to the 15th MEU, my perception was there was a lot of

interest and effort and energy at the 15th MEU and at the MEF level to get after those concepts and as part of their -- it's part of their work up and more specifically it's part of their deployment.

IO (Col (c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)): So I'll ask you a question along those lines. And it might be largely opinion based, but in the interest of getting after these future concepts associated with forced design, do you think that in any way shape or form distracter from the basics of compositing a MEU and some of the basic requirements or, no, it was just we're gonna form our MEU we're going to composited per standard operating procedures, and our focus of effort is going to be on learning, developing, rehearsing, building upon these future concepts for expeditionary events, base operations?

WIT: I don't know that it was a distraction. What I will say is at the Division level when I talk about our waterfall chart, our team plan or deployment plan for the infantry battalions and the enablers that the build them out, especially if they're going to be a Battalion Landing Team, the discussion about an early chop causes some friction.

IO  $(Col_{(c)}^{(b)(3),(b)(6),(b)(7)})$ : So what would the early chop have meant in time frame, what dates would that have been?

WIT: The MEF composite brief -- there was -- actually, there was a label, the D minus 270 brief, but it was the 15th MEU composite brief. They ended up going in on March 11 of 20. The actual chop itself occurred in April. And if my memory serves correct, we were not anticipating the chop to go until about May.

Now, what would caveat that with is when I talked about concerns from the commander or the commanders in this case, we had a discussion about the early chop and the Division pushed back a bit. But they were -- when it was clear that they wanted to pursue compositing a bit early, we got behind it and I never heard any concerns from the Victor 1/4 CO, from the 1st Marine CO, or the 3d Track CO, for that matter. And that was from, again, from my periodic interaction with the operations officers of the battalions, with the commanders themselves, and then also through their SITREPS that they would send out every two weeks to the CG.

I was on the CC line and I would read every single one of them. I never -- I do not recall any concerns from the commanders of if we chopped early, we will not be able to meet this training milestone or if we chop early, we will not be able to accomplish the mission.

IO (Col $^{\text{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}}$ ): Along the line of building that BLT and

you talked about 3rd AA Battalion. What role does Division staff have a battalion to provide a platoon to support this MEU. Is there any more in-depth decision the platoon has to meet these certain qualifications or is it 3rd Tracks, assign a platoon, they're going to be part of this BLT in support of X MEU.

WIT: Yes. That's a good question. So the MEF -- again, this came out of the G-37. So I was intimately familiar with. The MEF generated the LOI. The MEF LOI is about a 30 or 40 page AMHS message. It goes into agonizing detail about how the MEF -- what the MEF will comprise, the timeline associated with it, what each MSE is responsible for providing. So it translated down to the Division level. We would convey those requirements to the MSC in the Division. Again, the battalion, the enabling -- the separate battalions who were providing the enablers. And we would communicate every requirement in terms of 3rd Track, 3rd AAV Battalion provide one platoon of this many peoples.

We did not go into the details of it will be this platoon from this company. It was the tasking them with the requirement and it was up to the commander to move to meet that requirement. In the case of 3d Tracks, as I recall, the 3d Track CO had undertaken an initiative to reorganize elements of battalion to essentially expand the capacity and the capability

of the battalion. And in a positive side effect or positive outcome of that was increasing the deployment opportunities for Marines in his battalion. So it's part of the reorg when he got -- when we conveyed the requirement to 3d Tracks to provide a platoon for BLT-14, the platoon selected was from Headquarters Company.

And that was also -- ended up being the platoon that deployed to Native Fury. So I can tell you this in hindsight that was probably was not a good decision.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3),\,(b)(6),\,(b)(7)}_{(c)}$ ): To use a platoon that went to Native Fury?

WIT: Yes. Because -- now, to be fair, all the Native Fury force at the Division and I think even at the MEF level, we thought the Native Fury Exercise was going to be one thing and that the force deploying and supporting Native Fury was going to be one thing and they both turned out to be another. And then the redeployment proved to be challenging getting everybody back on time and all the equipment back on time.

So the -- in the aftermath, looking at it, my assessment is that platoon that 3rd Tracks Platoon was deployed to Native Fury, they were challenged with their readiness when they got back. It would have been a very quick turn by the time

they got back from Native Fury when they had to be ready chopped to 15th MEU.

Now, the other part of your question, what measures in place did we have to oversee or supervise this? So the Division does have a MCCRE order. And the parameters of that order is it directs all battalions to conduct MCCRE, at least on an annual basis. And that includes separate battalions that are providing companies, platoons, or debts in support of deployments, whether they're Westpac MEUs or SPMAGTF or UDP. There's a requirement to do MCCREs.

Within the body that order, there is a language that gives commanders the authority -- or the leeway rather to conduct MCCREs as part of larger or other external exercises and the example 1/4 doing their MCCRE at it ITX it all set the order also encouraged separate battalions who are providing debts for deployments encourages those battalions to have those debts participate in MCCRE with the unit they're deploying with.

So that sounds great. In the case of Victor 1/4 in this platoon from 3rd Tracks, it wasn't able to happen because that platoon was at Native Fury. So that platoon never got a MCCRE. And we didn't hear about them not getting into MCCRE, or least I didn't hear about them getting a MCCRE until then in

March.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6)}$ ): But your understanding of by the Division order that you required that?

WIT: Yes. And again, this is in hindsight. But what -in -- here and Steal Night 20 which was in December of 19, 3rd
Tracks, had they briefed us at the Division level of their plan
to doctor a battalion level MCCRE focused on their battalion
headquarters here in the context of Steel Night. And they did
execute that MCCRE but that platoon was not a part of it.

IO (Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)): So when something like that happens and there was a lot going on, the platoon coming back from Native Fury, then going into ROM, they go to JLTIs and then chop. When something is identified like that, they didn't get a MCCRE per the Division order. How does that battalion commander -- did he say this is a concern, this is what we're doing to mitigate it? Or how would Division even know that they didn't have a MCCRE?

Is there a way to track that or to verify their training status?

WIT: So completion of MCCRE is supposed to be recorded in MCTIMS. I can tell you that we had and continue to have a lot of challenges since this. We're getting the information put in the database as far as our force, the Division's oversight on its

conducting MCCREs. We -- to my knowledge, we did not have a mechanism in place. You know what? You know what we used to call a tick or file a mechanism in place that would say, hey, this particular unit is deploying on this day. So we need to know about its MCCRE status. Typically, that information would come up and it did come up in the D minus briefs that we received. The deployment minus whether it was D minus 270, D minus 180, or D minus 30 that would be a brief enable item by the commanders in those briefs.

We conducted a MCCRE in this time period in the case of 3rd Tracks as a separate battalion. That battalion did not give a D minus brief with our -- in my perspective on this or my assessment on this is we were missing something in the Division. What I mean by missing something, we're missing a key billet holder. That key billet holder that we're missing was a Assistant Division Commander. Because historically in the Division, you have a Commanding General, Assistant Division Commander who's a one star and the chief of staff and they know the assistant chief of staff. The Division has not had an ADC, since my recollection, since about 2014. Traditionally, one of the roles the ADC plays in the Division is direct commander oversight of the separate O-5 level battalions. But we did not

have that structure in place. And if there had been any kind of my sense is that they've been independent backstop by having that person in place, we might have been able to catch it. But the absence of an ADC meant that those D minus briefs that were being done by separate battalion commanders who were providing debts from the company down to the platoon level, those briefs were actually going to the staff.

So if there was ever going to be a brief, it would have been from the 3rd Track CO and whatever DET commander he was sending me, the chief of staff, and likely not to Commanding General. Is that it? Does that makes sense?

IO  $(Col^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)})$ : It does. Is that standard practice a separate Battalion CO with the platoon Commander slated to float would brief the chief of staff?

WIT: It's not standard. It's traditionally that brief will be delegated to or would be received by the Assistant Division Commander. So during this time period of -- it was my understanding that 2nd Marine Division and 3rd Marine Division had Assistant Division Commanders, the role being filled by post command O-6s. We did not have that in 1st Marine Division. We had the Commanding General, chief of staff, and then the assistant chief of staff. Within the assistant chiefs of staff,

which I was one of them, only three of those are 0-6s. Me, the G-2 and the G-4 the rest were O-5s.

IO (Col (c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)): So the BLT commander or Victor 1/4 commander at the time is receiving this platoon of Amtrak's for his mech company and they attached to that battalion. Did he ever raise a concern -- was he aware, to your knowledge?

WIT: Not to my knowledge. My assessment, when that when the coordination began between -- the planning and coordination began between Victor 1/4 Commander and his team and the enablers that were going to chop form BLT-14 when they began having their initial planning and coordination, when we granted them during off those concerns that would been the time that those concerns came up or should have come up. I don't know if they did. And again, I never heard any concerns from either the Victor 1/4, the 1st Marines CO, or the 3rd track CO for that matter.

IO (Col $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}$ ): Interesting. So given everything that you just spoke about over the last hour or so, would you recommend any changes to existing orders or policies?

 about the last six-months or so, six or eight-months. That's made a difference. I will tell you from my role as the G-3, working with the CG -- working with General Castellvi on a daily basis in his office, multiple times a day, in many cases, 23,000 Marines and sailors in 1st Marine Division, which again is the largest component of the GCE in the Marine Corps.

With the GFM cycle we have, with daily operations and training that we execute, that's too much for a one star Commanding General to do. Having that we brought on an ADC that has been able to spread the load that responsibility and just the last six or seven-months or so that we've had ADC, there's been a significant difference in the amount of interaction and oversight that he's had with separate battalions. Because quite frankly, the separate battalion commanders and 1st Marine Division -- and a lot of times I got the sense that they were alone, unafraid out there. And not -- as a badge of honor. There was a lot there's a there was a law and continues to be a lot of authority and responsibility given to those battalion commanders with the expectation that they got to accomplish the mission. They are O-5s on their own lives on their own swimming in a sea of O-6 commanders and, for lack of a better term, that den daddy for the 0-5s was not there.

And so, it's conceivable that things fell through the cracks that maybe concerns -- again, this is me, hypothesizing or postulating here it's conceivable that some of the O-5 commanders, maybe the 3rd Tracks Commander, might have been reluctant to bring some issues to the Commanding General because maybe they did not rise to that level. I don't know if they would bring those O-5 commanders would bring those concerns to the chief of staff.

But like I said, I would expect they would bring concerns like that to me. But I never heard concerns about training. I never heard concerns about, hey, we're moving too quickly down this path chop. Never heard concerns about material readiness. The third tracks. Now, as part of that all of the commanders in the Division at the O-6 level and O-5 level, from my perspective, were genuinely focused on all aspects of readiness within their regiments and battalions.

And that was a direct result of the attention that the Commanding General placed on readiness. The Commanding General placed -- I mean, really, the priority for him for the Division was how our readiness this was. And so it was a briefable item. Each month when we month we had what was called the Commander's Sivits[sic], which was all of the O-6 and separate battalion

commanders dialing in or in person, before COVID, sitting down with the CG and that it wasn't just a commander's update, it was a commander's update, but also briefing readiness, briefing personnel readiness, training, readiness supply, material readiness. And the CG was intimately involved with each unit when they report their readiness ratings. And he would ask questions along the lines of a 5 percent dip between this month and last month. Or I've noticed you've increased your personnel readiness. So he was involved with it. But again, when it came to light -- my sense was when it came to the O-5 commander, the separate O-5 commanders, they didn't have quite the same level oversight that they could have.

IO ( $Col_{(c)}^{(b)(3),(b)(6),(b)(7)}$ ): On their readiness?

WIT: Just in general and just in general.

IO  $(\text{Col}_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6)})$ : I'm definitely familiar with that aspect that you're talking about. But definitely seems like there's venues for them to get to the CG although it seems like it could be difficult at times.

WIT: Oh, absolutely. Let me be really clear about that.

Again, I had access to the CG calendar and I looked at it every day and I in the level of interface and interaction that he had with all the commanders in the Division, but specifically with

the 0-6 commanders and separate commanders, you know, we all had -- I say we all -- they all had monthly and calls, you know, office calls with him was one on one for an hour, social events, multiple commanders conferences, multiple commanders Sivits.

So -- and General Castellvi made it a priority get out and see units that were in the field, whether they were in the field, Camp Pendleton or in 29 Palms, or if they were deployed down to the border or to the Mercy.

So from my perspective as the G-3, there was never a lack of opportunity for the commanders, any commander to get face time with the CG.

IO  $(\text{Col}_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6)})$ : Was there any other -- on that same line,  $^{(b)(3), (b)}$  (6),  $^{(b)(7)(c)}$ , was there any other issues with 11th Marines, 1st CEB9, 1st Recon Battalion as they composited -- formerly composited their neighbor units for the 15th MEU?

WIT: I was not aware of any concerns from any of the other elements of BLT-14. The unit that I talked about earlier, the unit that there was, I think the most discussion and an interest in was 1st Recon, providing the reconnaissance force and 1st LAR's contribution. 1st LAR came up with an initiative to provide personnel to be trained on ribs to contribute to the ADR. Then ADR — it was going to be the proof of concept for them to

be the first time that they were employed after the MEF had a reorganization effort for the first week on the previous year.

But now, from the other elements of BLT-14, I never registered any concerns from any of the commanders of units, whether it was CEB Marines or 11th Marines.

The only -- I think the only concern that I had heard but it was a broader concern was about the constant demand signal for high marks. But the 11th Marine CO at the time -- my sense, it was a more of a broader reaching commentary that over time we may be stressed to fill all the demand signals for HIMARS and launchers but in the near term, he had a plan to source the requirement for the MEU and for the other non-standard MAGTFS, or a single ship deployers that the MEF was generating that when that was, you know, when I talked about the first five or six-months of 2020.

One of the other things that we were -- that there was a lot of work being generated and a lot of churn was on to single ship deployers that the MEF was the point. One was Task Force al-Asaad, the other was KOA Muwana. And within all that churn was not just the compositing of those single ship task forces and the training associated with it, but there was also the challenge of just getting them out the door because of COVID between ROM

and getting people embarked and not wanting to infect the ship.

That all was happening against the backdrop of what happened with

the Teddy Roosevelt.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)}_{(7)(c)}$ ): I remember both Koa Muana task force al-Asaad was reduced from the original scope.

WIT: They were. They absolutely were.

IO (Col $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}$ ): We've kept you well pass an hour.

WIT: Yes. I'm here as long as you need me. Whatever context or info I can provide.

IO (Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)): So I guess I just have one more question on the oversight part. I ask this question in the context that you don't have a lot of depth in your bench in the G-3 and I'm only asking from a perspective, I'm not you asking to speak for the rest of Division. But when you look at the overall readiness of your force, is it something that's pushed to Division? Certainly it is the responsibility of a commander to make sure the force is properly trained and equipped to conduct its mission. Is Division in a receive mode or they in a receive in and verify mode?

I don't know if you have the bandwidth to verify that, but you've got a commander telling you that I'm trained in this, this, this and this. And this is the status of my force. I'm

ready to conduct these missions. Is Division in a receive mode on that or is there a process where Division goes down and verifies or validates?

WIT: No, I think it is a fair question. That I think that's the role of General Officer, of a General staff. And not just to support the commanding. General, but to support the subordinate commands as well. And our need to facilitate the success of the subordinate commands. Our operating model on the Division staff within the G-3 was we're here to support the units. We're here to support the battalions, the regiments. And in my role as the G-3, what I was always looking for was exactly what I've said multiple times here in the last hour. I was looking for commanders registering concerns. Because the term "concern" I am concerned about this or I have concerns is it is an instant red star cluster. If a commander says I have concerns about this or I am concerned about this, the commander doesn't you have to say do not concur. All the commander has to say is I am concerned. And in the G-3, we go into overdrive. And in any other shop they would go into overdrive if it was a material readiness concern or supply concern. The G-4 would go into overdrive. If it was a training concern or a deployment concern, G-3 would go into overdrive to get to the bottom of what the

commander and his team needed to do, really do whatever we could to facilitate their success.

So, you know, so I will tell you personally that that's my frustration in all this. And, you know, in full disclosure, I've memorized this investigation. I was one of the notification teams, one of the backup teams, but I had to memorize the investigation. So I know all about what happened in the postmortem, no pun intended. So my frustration is -- my personal frustration is if any, if there were any concerns registered by the commanders, specifically the commanders of 1st Marines, Victor 1/4, 3rd Tracks, I never heard about them. I don't know if those concerns were registered to my shops in the G-3 or if they were registered to other elements of the Division staff, but I never heard anything about it.

When it came to the compositing of 15th MEU, and I talked about this earlier, the issues that generated the most interest and energy and churn had to do with the all domain reconnaissance force and trying to figure out how to employ that and rubber boats. Because 15th MEU wanted rubber boats and the Division didn't have rubber boats to give. Those were the big issues. There was a lot of like hand wringing and teeth gnashing and churn over. There were never any concerns about the material

readiness of the AAV platoon that was provided. There were never any concerns raised about UET training and the numbers that it had or had not been through that, and there were never any concerns about integration between that AAV platoon and track company from Victor 1/4. None of that was ever raised to my level or to my knowledge, to the level of any of my action officers in my future operations shop, my plan shop, my training shop, or my readiness shop.

And the only, you know, that you've talked about. Yeah, in catching weight ways to verify or any catching features, the ways we would do that the things that would be — that would catch our attention would be either the generation of the DERS brief with the meatball chart of the kind of the cryptic here's the unit and this is its assigned mission. This is its core methods or assignments, what its P rating, T rating, S rating, R rating, or what it C rating is the development of that to support the monthly DERS brief and the monthly DERS report.

That would be an indicator if a unit was dropping in readiness but by my recollection, across the board, the readiness was sustained high level. Those were the levels that were being reported by the subordinate regiments and commands. And again -- and then two, as part of each commander's monthly SITREP to the

CG in addition to the monthly commander's readiness Sivits that we all did that they all participated in, the commanders would report their readiness ratings by P, T, S, and R and whether their readiness had dipped or increased over the month.

And so in each one of those SITREPS and I'll tell you something that I specifically remember, and I still have all those SITREPS, every single SITREP that commanders would send up across the board, whether it was for CEB, 1st Marines, 11th Marines, they provide all the details and on every single one, General Castellvi would write back and comment on all the major things in that report to include commenting on whether or not that battalion's or that regiment's readiness had dipped even good and he would even go down into when he would receive the SITREPS from the infantry regiments or the artillery regiment. He would comment on the readiness of the subordinate battalions within those regiments or something to the effect of, I notice Victor 1/4 readiness has gone down. You know, what's the status with that? So there was a level of interest at the CG level on the readiness reporting within the Division.

IO  $(\text{Col}_{(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}$ : Do you recall any thoughts or concerns he may have had with 3rd Tracks within that timeframe that we're discussing?

WIT: No. And, in fact, I recall a specific comment that he made in response to a SITREP from 3rd Tracks about the things that 3rd Tracks was doing to pull his team together and increase its training and to your readiness. And the quote that he used was he said it has been a Herculean effort by 3rd Tracks. That was General Castellvi, his quote, it was a Herculean effort to continue to do accomplish the mission. So I don't remember any concerns from the CG about the, you know, the performance of 3rd Tracks or them preparing their units for UDP, 31st MEU, the West Coast MEU.

IO (Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7): Just one last question. I don't know if this is even in your purview, but from your perspective, would you know if 3rd Tracks had any alternatives to choosing a platoon for that or were they so operationally committed and strapped that it was the only route they had to take? Someone who's come back from Native Fury are gonna be on two weeks of ROM and then go right to a chop?

WIT: I will tell you in hindsight and from what I know from the investigation, that if what was written in the investigation was true, the 3rd Tracks commander he not understand what he was sending that platoon to do in Native Fury. There was never -- from my perspective, is the G-3 within you and the oversight that

I had in the Native Fury 20 planning, there was never an expectation that the exercise force was gonna get world class training there. And I knew that having done BILAT training with foreign military forces.

You're just not going to get the level and quality of training that you do at a place like Camp Pendleton or ITX or, you know, at 29 Palms, because quite often the exercise is about working with the foreign military and working within their limitations or their constraints. And the exercise at its core was an NPF off load. So that was going to determine what the exercise force could do. It's going to determine what equipment they had or had access to. And then on top of all of that, there was a, you know, there's the threat of an Iranian ballistic missile attack, which was kind of the umbrella or the dark cloud over all that.

So -- but so, again, I think it's two parts. And again, this is my assessment that is after the fact. I didn't have any position on it at the time. There was the decision to send that platoon to Native Fury. That's my understanding that decision was based on two things, the training that team was going to get in UAE, and the fact that there was going to be training with the battalion it was gonna be deploying with.

That was -- and that was some kind of -- I think that was some kind of misunderstanding that the 3rd Track CO had, because that was not the battalion that was going to deploy with 15th MEU it was Victor 1/1. There'd been a lot of discussion about Victor 1/1 going because Victor 1/1 had just returned several months before from MRFD. They returned in the October timeframe and then had a brief respite and then geared up with the 1st Marine Regiment headquarters to deploy with Native Fury.

So Victor 1/4 was never aligned to Native Fury. And I don't know where the 3rd Track CO got the idea that it would be 1/4 or that maybe 1/1 would be the BLT. I don't know if he was misinformed. I don't know if he didn't recall something correctly. But sending that platoon to Native fury, you know, in hindsight was probably not a good idea. Had it not gone, and, you know -- again, we could talk to this forever. But had it not gone to Native Fury, it could have conceived it could have conceivably conducted a MCCRE with Victor 1/4 but if they conducted Victor -- MCCRE with Victor 1/4, that doesn't necessarily mean that what happened would --

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}$ ): No, sure doesn't.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6)}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ ): A couple threads from what you just said,  $^{(b)(3), (b)}_{(6), (b)(7)(c)}$ . So I've been in some of the same MEF readiness briefs you

have, as you know and familiar with the chart you're talking about. But I wondered then and I still do now, I'd like your opinion on this is there's definitely some gaps and seems were particular with the enabler battalions -- I mean, other than a neighbor battalion, obviously wanting to put his best unit forward for all the requirements, but you numerary -- and there's a lot of requirements out there for all the battalions that we're all familiar with. But frankly, in the DERS system, there isn't a logical incentive for an enabler battalion. You degrade his readiness. So he sends out the best unit, the best people, the best vehicles, his battalion readiness drops and the MEU doesn't -- there's not a ledger on the other side or the MEU gets better and --

WIT: That's right.

IO (Col (b)(7)(e) 1: -- it's shown. It's just the MEU forms and it's great. We call it the crown jewel. And so that's one question I'd be curious to your opinion on. The other question is there didn't seem to be a lot of water-borne ops with just the AAV platoon and then the AAV platoon and 1/4. That seems to be a gap. And I'm not sure if that would ever bear out -- but could, in a commander's assessment of the drudge report. But whether that would ever bear out in a standard report. But your thoughts

on that would be great.

WIT: So the first question about DERS reporting of my answer is I agree with you. It does not -- the way we currently report readiness does not to -- use the a popular termina. It does not incentivize a separate battalion commander to send his base best component forward.

Now, I don't know if that was the mental calculus that the 3rd Tracks commander made when he identified this platoon from H&S company to Support BLT 1/4, but having seen DERS reported by many different units for many years now. Especially, since I was when I was a G-37 and then the G-3. My assessment is that different commanders report in DERS in many different ways and I had periodically -- I periodically thought as the G-3 that there seemed to be a disparity in how separate battalions were reporting. That some battalions seemed to have limitless capacity and were constantly in the green or some regiments, had no limitless capacity, costly and green. And others, you know, would be would constantly be in the red. And my personal assessment at the time when I would see that is the guy that's constantly in the red and is reporting essentially non-mission capable is reporting C-3 or C-4 he's being honest because -- in the case of, for example, an LAR battalion that at any given time as -- 3rd LAR as an example. At any given time, 3rd LAR has one company on deployment, one company preparing for deployment, and one company back home.

In -- and so, that automatically means that only really -- probably only two on deck. And one of those is really ready. And so, an honest commander is going to report. Yeah. My rating is my ability to conduct my wartime Mets it's going to be lower because I don't have my entire force here with me. A less honest commander or someone who's trying to be a team player is gonna be more inclined to say, I will be able to figure it out. And again, those were personal observations and in some cases, personal frustrations that I had. But those personal observations and frustrations were overridden each time by the fact that whenever we called on a regiment or battalion to do something, they not only were able to do it, they were able to do it willingly and with a smile on their face and eagerly. And so, it was hard to argue that if that makes sense.

IO  $(Col_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6)}$  : It does.

WIT: And the second -- sorry. The second question -
IO (Col (b)(3), (b)(6),

So kind of getting back to the seam of 3rd tracks Battalion DERS reporting and you're all the way down to platoon level. I mean, do you have any recommendations in how

you can highlight that other than I mean, you can put in the commander's comments, you can go out at mission assessment. I know we have unit employment tables now. And I was involved with formation of that. I mean, there -- I don't know how that's going, frankly, for unit since we implemented that I guess. Is there a better way for the MSC to report to MEF or there should be -- should there be questions the MEF is asking the MSC that they're not right now on the readiness side?

this is something that I really -- the interaction that I was able to have with General Castellvi and the rest of the staff when I was the G-3 -- and to a certain degree where I worked in the MEF G-3 something that I've really learned and they have really taken to heart is there are certain things -- for example, in 1st Marine Division, the commanders are given a lot of leeway and they're given a lot of authority to make decisions on their own. And with that, there is a significant degree of accountability for them, both accountability and responsibility -- accountability for the responsibility that they have. So with that, on a general staff there are certain things that we have to expect our commanders to do without having to ask about without having to check up on them. What concerns I have

is someone who has spent a significant amount of time on staffs, you know, from the battalion level all the way up to the joint staff is a road we're going to go down where we're going to expect a Commanding General of a Division or a MEF to ask an Amtrak battalion commander, assault amphibian battalion commander when the last time to pick particular platoon water ops. Because the Commanding General, 1st Marine Division should expect that third that assault amphibious battalion commander is doing that. Does that make sense what I'm saying there.

IO (Col $_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6)}$ ): That sure does.

WIT: There are things that you automatically -- and again,

I live it every day, trust but verify. That's part of being a

leader and part of being a commander. And there are certain

things where you have to be able to expect that are happening.

You have to be to able expect that people paying the rent, you

have to be able to expect that people are paying the bills, you

have to expect that your company commanders have a physical

training program.

You know, you have to expect that -- otherwise it becomes an endless checklist of diving down into the weeds and the commander's ability to prioritize and accomplish the mission. I think it is impacted. Again, this is all this opinion, but

it's opinion that's informed by -- I've commanded the O-5 level, I've commanded twice at the O-6 level, and I've served on general staffs. And the deeper that we go into checking up on regimental and battalion commanders for things that they should have been doing in the first place. I think we're taking on some risk.

IO (Col (b)(7)(c) : Yeah. And the reason I asked, (6), (b)(7)(c), is you pretty much stated and explained. I don't think we want to recommend anything from the service level that's going to erode good, solid marine culture. That's all I have.

IO (Col (c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7) : (6), (b)(7) , thank you. This has been very, very helpful. Anything you want to add -- are we missing anything? Is there someone we should talk to or additional documents other than those listed in the investigation that you think we should read?

WIT: So I've got several documents. If you don't have access to them that I can get to you. I reviewed -- I saw this coming, all right. Especially after reading the investigation that caused me to go back and look at, you know, our involvement at the division level and my own involvement as the G-3. So there are some documents that I think underscore some of these things that we've talked about. Whether it's the D minus 270 brief that we had a division level for 1/4 or the composite brief

for the MEU that happened in March. My frustration is that I was not at that composite brief because I was at the D.C. Commander's Course.

And I know General Castellvi attended it because there was a requirement for the MSC commanders to attend. But I was not there and I regret that. And in the aftermath when I got the out brief — or the note, so the ex some from that brief, there were no concerns that were brought up. And that is the time during a MEU composite brief where you have the three MSC commanders in the room with either the CG or the DCG from the MEF and all of the MEF primary staff there, and likely all of the G-3s for the MSC. That composite brief historically is where, you know, there's usually a laundry list of action items that have to be addressed afterwards or, you know — or concerns or whatever. And I never heard anything apart from a desire for rubber boats, a desire for high mars, and, you know, that desire possibly for 1800 for tankers.

So I do have some briefs that may help -- and as far as, you know -- as far as -- any in anything else, I mean I guess say that I think meet me talking here. What, you know, what I'm saying. It is colored by the fact that I know so much about the investigation and the mishap as I do and if you're asking for my

personal opinion or my professional opinion. What I can tell you is there were -- and I think it's widely known as a result of the investigation. There were a series of signals along the way and in the links in the chain that at any point if somebody cut one of these links, the disaster wouldn't have happened. But.

I can honestly tell you that at the division level, the red flags that were brought up in the course of the investigation. I never saw them. And I don't think that I was -- I never felt and then -- I'm sure no one ever does, but I never felt like I was derelict in my duties. I felt like I had a pretty good grasp of what was going on, not only in my shop and across the division staff, but across the entire division, because that's the job I was getting paid to do. So when we talk about what was missed in what measures do we have in place for oversight supervision, I guess the last thing I could close with is that -- it was exactly what I opened with. The first six months of 2020, it was a challenge. And it would have been a challenge even if COVID hadn't broken mid-March. But the minute COVID happened, that increased the level of friction by orders of magnitude.

And the requirement that was both -- that was, you know -- when we heard from the Commandant -- when we heard the

Commandant say in a press conference that -- when people were challenging him about why there were still service level exercises going on, and the Commandant said, "the enemy never has given us an invite or the enemy has never set an appointment for when they're going to attack us." We took that to heart and that's why the ITX and the WTI were canceled. That's why there was so much energy into, hey, reach up and starting up and doing a 5-SLTE so that we did not miss that training opportunity.

And then as part of all of that -- as the commanders with within the Division were attempting to continue to train their Marines, they were -- what they were also having to fight was the groundswell from families and from Marines within the force filing complaints with the Inspector General about why are we training when there's a pandemic going on. And so there was -- to add into on top of all this friction, there was also the daily distraction of multiple investigations going on in the Division at the time into why are commanders training their

So, again, it would have been a challenging spring between, you know, global events, the exercise cycle, the spring GFM cycle and then the MEU composite on top of all that. It would have been challenging as it was, but COVID, like I said,

made it challenging by orders of magnitude. Not undoable, but it added another layer of friction and I shouldn't say that a pandemic is a distraction, but it became a distraction. It was challenging to keep everybody focused when on any given day we had we'd have people on the division staff popping for COVID. We'd have family members popping for COVID. We had it -- even during the month of April, we finally -- for one month, we did a port and starboard rotation on the division headquarters where about half the division headquarters was working. The other half was teleworking. And we did that a week at a time. But the red line that the chief of staff said when we agree to do this, was we will do this as long as there is no impact to our daily operations.

And to my knowledge there what it was challenging, but there was not a deleterious impact to what we were doing on the division headquarters. And after a month, we said, okay, this was a good experiment. We accomplished the mission, but we're going to go back to ops normal and everybody's got to come back to work. Hopefully that helps set the stage a little bit or summarize the stage.

IO (Col (c) ): Yeah, it certainly does. Eric, do you have any more questions?

IO (Col  $_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6),}$ ): No.

IO  $(\text{Col}_{(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)})$ :  $^{(b)(3), (b)}_{(6), (b)(7)(c)}$ , one, thanks very much. This has been very, very helpful. I've got a closing statement that we read to you.

You are directed not to discuss the interview or anything that was discussed during the interview with anyone other than members of the investigation team. If you are asked about the investigation, do not answer any questions and immediately notify one of us, the investigating officer, Lieutenant General Mundy, or your commanding officer.

[The investigative interview closed at 1146, 14 April 2021.]

I, Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , attest that the preceding transcript is a true and accurate verbatim account of the interview of Col K. Folsom held on 14 April 2021. (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)

Col, USMC

#### **BACKGROUND QUESTIONS**

1. What is your name, rank and current billet?

Colonel Christopher J. Bronzi, USMC – I MEF Staff

2. What was your billet on 30 July 2020?

15th MEU Commanding Officer

- 3. What specific dates did you hold this billet?
- 13 November 2020 23 March 2021
- 4. Describe your duties and responsibilities in that position.

My duties and responsibilities were to lead 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) through its pre-deployment training program (PTP) & subsequent deployment in support of contingency & crisis response operations.

#### **INITIAL QUESTIONS**

5. Describe the command environment and what you were experiencing on, and before, the time of the mishap on 30 July 2020?

In relation to the command environment within I MEF, I would categorize it as a healthy command climate. I believe 15th MEU was a priority for the MEF in terms of manning, training & equipping us for our composite and deployment.

I MEF held quarterly summits, during which each of the Major Subordinate Commands' (MSCs) Commanding Generals attended to discuss the I MEF Campaign Plan, Training, Exercise and Employment Plan (TEEP), readiness issues and other concerns across specified MEF Lines of Effort and the warfighting functions. I believe they achieved unity of effort across the MEF.

The MEF Commanding General set a tone within the MEF that engendered support to his MSCs and Major Subordinate Elements (MSEs). As a Commander, I felt comfortable bringing issues to the I MEF Deputy Commanding General (BGen Savage), the MEF Chief of Staff (Colonel (b)(7)(c) ), any of the MEF Staff or the Commanding General himself.

Within 15th MEU, I would assess our command environment as positive. We had a very cohesive staff. We held weekly staff meetings to ascertain progress across each of the warfighting functions and this continued through composite. I emphasized intellectual courage as much as physical or moral courage to encourage the staff and our MSEs to identify friction points, suggest ways to be more effective and efficient, and ensure we embraced a comprehensive approach to problem-solving.

6. What were the major challenges at the unit level (institutional or otherwise) that you were facing on, and before, the time of the mishap on 30 July 2020?

A combination of material readiness, a compressed training timeline, and adjustments to our PTP schedule were challenges for 15th MEU.

#### FORMING AND COMPOSITING THE MEU

7. Was the forming and compositing of BLT 1/4 different from previous BLTs to your knowledge? If so, what was different? Why do you think it was different?

I served as the Commander of BLT 1/4 in 2013-2014. That is my most recent and relevant experience compared with this composite. BLT 1/4 attended ITX just prior to composite – a similar approach to my experience in 2013. However, there was a different approach to manning this BLT. Many key leaders joined the unit later than I experienced as a BLT Commander in 2012-2013.

It was briefed during a pre-composite event (I believe the E-211 Brief) that V14 was over 100% manning for officers able to deploy. Shortly after composite, in a weekly situation report submitted by the BLT Commander, I discovered the BLT was short by at least 4 Rifle Platoon Commanders. I believe the 2nd Platoon Commander in Bravo Company, BLT 1/4 was one of those late joining Lieutenants.

8. To your knowledge, did 1st Marine Division and the other I MEF MSCs fail to adhere to prescribed forming and compositing timelines as prescribed by MEF and Marine Corps orders and directives? If so, when, and what was the impact?

The MEF LOI provided a definitive timeline and if issues emerged, the staffs and commanders addressed them.

9. Do you believe the MCCRE and pre-composite readiness evaluation requirements were well understood by the 1st Marine Division and 1st Marine Regiment?

I believe the requirements were understood. The training, personnel and material readiness status of 1st Marine Division units joining 15th MEU was briefed several times prior to composite. 1st Marine Division and I MEF leadership were present.

10. How do you think 1st Marine Division assessed the readiness of the entire battalion landing team while they were forming for the 15th MEU and after the 15th MEU composited if required.

From what I remember during the pre-composite briefs, the Division's assessment of the BLT indicated their preparedness to composite. It was briefed and I do not remember anything standing out to me that would indicate the BLT was not ready to composite.

### 11. What role did the I MEF Commanding General and G-3 have in supervising, directing, validating or assessing the readiness of units or attachments to the 15th MEU.

I believe the I MEF LOI delineated these roles. I communicated regularly with the MEF G-3. Any issues were brought to the G-3 or appropriate MEF Staff Section by my staff. When AAVs were experiencing delays with their Joint Limited Technical Inspections, I discussed this personally with the MEF G-3. I understand that he then communicated with both the MEF G-4 and his counterpart at 1st Marine Division.

There were also biweekly Commanders SVTC that I regularly attended – hosted by the MEF CG with MSC/MSE Commanders in attendance (along with the MEF COS and G-3). There was also a comprehensive battle rhythm that enabled frequent discussion between primary staff and commanders within the MEF to address issues and concerns across the warfighting functions.

## 12. What was the stated focus of effort, or priorities, of the commanders for I MEF and your unit from March – July 2020?

Our focus of effort as a MEU was to prepare for deployment. My Command and Staff Meeting Briefs during this period capture what I laid out as my priorities for a given time period. We brought our MSEs into those weekly Command and Staff Meetings. Through the MEF Battle Rhythm events, we were made aware of the MEF priorities.

# 13. Did the 15th MEU and its MSEs have adequate time to train to standards? Did other requirements degrade their capacity or ability to train to required core and assigned METs?

I believe we had adequate time to train to standards and following our certification exercise we were certified for deployment. COVID posed some unique challenges as demonstrated by the adjustment to our training schedule and associated timelines.

#### 14. How does 1st Marine Division, to your knowledge, select units for MEU deployment?

Based on my experience as a Regimental Operations Officer for 1st Marine Regiment (2011-2012), the 1st Marine Division selected units for MEU deployment based on the timing of the deployment, where that unit was in its lifecycle, and other Global Force Management requirements. I do not have any reason to believe this has changed.

# 15. Would you recommend any changes to I MEF, 1st Marine Division or 1st Marine Regiment policies or staff practices as a result of this incident?

I recommend additional time be set aside for MSEs (the BLT in particular) prior to composite to conduct personnel, training & equipment readiness assessments to ensure they are able to meet the requirements as laid out in the MEF LOI.

#### TRAINING AND MATERIAL READINESS

# 16. To your knowledge, were there training challenges experienced by the MSEs in preparing to composite the 15th MEU? If so, what were they and how were they addressed?

I would assess the most significant challenge experienced by the MSEs as we prepared to composite the 15th MEU was COVID. As mentioned earlier, timelines were compressed, adjustments to the conduct of training were implemented and schedules had to be modified.

17. Was 1st Marine Division, 1st Marine Regiment or 15th MEU, to your knowledge, hampered by a lack of funding and resources in their efforts to ensure the BLT was properly trained to deploy?

I believe the 15th MEU was adequately funded.

## 18. What were 1st Marine Division and I MEF's respective policies regarding COVID while conducting training from January to July 2020?

I MEF published an extensive operations order regarding COVID. Operational Planning Teams at the MEF level were conducted frequently to adapt to the dynamic COVID environment. The resultant plans ensured we were able to continue training while mitigating risk to force and mission.

### 19. What specific impacts did COVID policies have on your ability to train your unit from January to July 2020?

COVID impacts on our ability to plan and conduct training were significant. We spent several weeks at the onset of COVID and over the course of the Pre-Deployment Training Program adjusting our plans and developing new plans for training. We worked closely with the MEF G-7 and other external agencies to ensure we accomplished as much of the training as possible according to its original design while mitigating inherent risks to force and mission.

Some of our training was postponed and as a result, we did not experience the same level of naval integration other MEUs normally experience. Some additional examples include – changing our venue for RUT, shifting PMINT by almost a month, and combining our last two at sea periods.

#### **OVERSIGHT OF THE 15TH MEU**

### 20. How was 1st Marine Division made aware of any training or equipment deficiencies at the MSE and attachment levels?

My staff and I communicated any issues through our counterparts on the MEF staff.

## 21. What were the key points or events in the forming of the BLT 1/4? Who specifically was responsible for planning, conducting and supervising each of those events?

I believe the MEF LOI established the key points/events in the formation of BLT 1/4. The BLT Commander was responsible for planning, conducting and supervising each of those events.

### 22. What measures are in place for I MEF and your unit to evaluate readiness beyond a DRRS report and to address potential risk?

I MEF's Battle Rhythm afforded opportunities to receive updates across the warfighting functions from the MSCs and MSEs. I observed training and conducted regular meetings and discussions with commanders and staff. My staff's interaction provided additional measures to assess the readiness of units beyond DRRS reporting as well as to address potential risk. ORM Matrices are reviewed by leadership within the MEU as well as the MSEs. My 15th MEU Commander's Guidance to the Staff and Commander's Training Guidance for 15th MEU both address this issue.

### **CONCLUSION**

### 23. Do you know of any other witnesses this investigation team should interview?

I recommend interviewing key members of 15th MEU staff.

#### 24. What documents do you recommend the investigation team review?

I recommend the investigation team review the following:

- I MEF Letter of Instruction for 15th MEU
- I MEF MEU SOP
- JP 3-02 Amphibious Operations
- NTTP 3-02-1M / MCWP 3-31.5 Ship to Shore Movement
- 15th MEU SOP
- 15th MEU Campaign Plan
- 15th MEU Deployment Order
- Pertinent Letters of Instructions/Operations Orders Promulgated by 15th MEU
- 15th MEU Commander's Intent
- Commander's Training Guidance for 15th MEU
- 15th MEU Commander's Guidance to the Staff

#### 25. Do you have any additional comments or information relevant to the investigation?

Given my short notice return to Camp Pendleton, I no longer have access to many of the source material and authoritative documents I had on ship, to include the 15th MEU Campaign Plan, the 15th MEU Deployment Order and many of the briefs germane to the questions in this document. I believe that information may assist in providing more specific information about training, priorities, and readiness as discussed in the questions above.

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[The investigative interview commenced on 1206, 16 April 2021.]

[WIT: Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) ]

[IO: Col (c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) ]

[IO: Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) ]

[CR: GySgt (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) ]
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IO (Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) ): Good afternoon. My name is Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , we are part of a team reviewing the facts and circumstances surrounding the formation of the 15th MEU and actions and decisions associated with the material conditioning, training, and personnel readiness thereof.

This investigation is associated with the assault amphibious vehicle mishap that occurred off San Clemente Island on 30 July 2020. We are not conducting a second investigation of the incident itself, but rather investigating from an institutional perspective to determine any changes that may be required or any actions that could or should have been implemented prior to the accident.

The Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Thomas, appointed Lieutenant General Mundy on 2 April 2021, to conduct this investigation, which includes, among other things, interviewing personnel from different organizations with

information relevant to the investigation. I have a convening order that I can e-mail or send you, if required, that lists some of that information, Wally.

The Staff Director of the Marine Corps, Major General Olson, appointed both Colonel (b)(3),(b)(6),(b)(7) and I to the investigation team on 8 April 2021. We are talking to you today in our investigatory capacity as a representative of Lieutenant General Mundy and General Thomas. We are required to provide General Thomas with a written report upon completion of our investigation. And I have another letter I can show you designating us as a member of the team, if you'd like to see that.

We are talking with you today because the investigating team believes that you may have information that may be relevant to the investigation.

The topics that we would like to cover today with you may include formation and compositing of the 15th MEU, training material readiness surrounding the formation and compositing of the 15th MEU, and I Marine Expeditionary Force, I MEF's, oversight of the 15th MEU.

This is an administrative investigation; however, due to the sensitive nature of the ongoing review we're asking

personnel we talked to as part of the investigation not to share anything we discussed today with any other person.

So before we start, do you have any questions about our role or this investigation?

WIT: No questions. I understand everything you just said. IO  $(Col_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6)})$ : Okay. Thanks, Wally.

For the record, please state your name, rank, and current occupation.

WIT: Okay.  $^{\text{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}}$  , retired colonel in the United States Marine Corps, current occupation, civilian helicopter pilot.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6)}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ ): And what was your billet on 30 July 2020? WIT: I was the operations officer for 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing.

IO (Col (b)(7)(c) : Okay. Thanks, (b)(7)(c) . So a couple initial questions, and they center on the command climate within 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing Headquarters, but specific to how the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing Headquarters dealt and interacted on a regular basis with I MEF's Headquarters, as well as how things were going with the formation and compositing of 3rd MAW's contribution to the 15th MEU.

So if you could,  $^{\text{(b)(3), (b)(6)}}_{\text{(b)(7)(c)}}$ , could you kind of talk us

through how that was going and what the quality of the relationship was with all those players, and based on your experience, not just at 3rd MAW, but throughout your career, how do you think that compositing and formation was going from your viewpoint?

WIT: Sure. I'll just start off by saying that, you know, I don't have any notes or calendars or any kind of documentation. So the exact sort of timelines are not real clear in my mind. But I think if you talk, sort of, in generalities and maybe zero in on some specifics if there's something you all need to delve into.

IO (Col (b)(3), (b)(6)): Sure. No problem.

with the 15th MEU -- first of all, overall, the -- my entire time, to include this specific timeframe that you're talking about, our relationship with I MEF I thought was really, really strong. One of the, you know, one of the high points of my time there at 3rd MAW was just the relationship with the MEF. In particular, my relationship with the G-3, with the deputy commander, or deputy CG, and then the CG. Regular interaction throughout battle rhythm events and, you know, numerous phone calls, emails, you know, drive by meetings, that kind of stuff, when to discuss issues in detail. So everything was really,

really positive in terms of just the flow of communication, the willingness of I MEF to hear our concerns and accommodate those concerns as best they could. And that started with the CG on down to through that to the staff.

Probably the one thing with respect to the 15th MEU that was a little bit frustrating for me for my billet and for me personally was just, with everything going on, you know, not just with -- it's tough enough, I think, compositing an ACE, compositing a MEU, just because of all the requirements that have to be met and the number of players that are involved, and of course readiness challenges and meeting all those requirements. But just when you look at the context of the trying to deal with the COVID crisis, the border, trying to meet higher objectives, I guess, especially with trying to do stuff throughout the Pacific AOR, trying to meet everybody's campaign plan from the MEF all the way up through MARFORPAC, et cetera.

So, you know, no surprise for anybody in the operating forces. It was super, super busy. There was a lot of moving parts. It's hard to do everything well. I'd say impossible to do everything well. And so, a lot of it was I was trying to focus on what the most critical aspects were. What due date or what milestone was coming up next.

So having said that it was busy for everybody and everybody was trying to make it work as best they could. So we put that all in that context with the 15th chop, and the big frustration was it was just really, really hard to meet all the requirements. Everyone was doing the best we could, but it was just a lot of requirements.

When you break out that MEU compositing order, and then the game plan and all the stuff that the EOTG needs to put the MEU through and which sets the framework for the timeline and everything else. I mean, it is a lot, a lot of stuff. And it was really, really hard, and frustrating at times just to try to meet those demands.

And as that kind of filters down to kind lower AO levels. Everybody is trying to put in a little bit extra time to get their review done of whatever milestone, whatever product you're trying to develop to meet the ultimate compositing milestones.

So having said all that, I MEF was really good about trying to work with us. And probably the only sort of, I guess, disagreement that we had was on the specific CHOP date of the ACE. You know, just with all the readiness challenges that we've had across every type model series. We're always looking to try

to try to make that CHOP date as late as we can.

So it's aircraft readiness that leads to a lack of aircraft available to train your pilots and air crews and maintainers and all the support personnel to be ready to meet the minimum threshold requirement for CHOP. And so, the farther that we can push that CHOP date to the right the better it works for us. Because any more time we have to train and make up for a lot of that lack of readiness and the material condition of aircraft and equipment.

So the big thing was when you look at the EOTG calendar, all the stuff that they need to do, and then you throw in holidays, you throw in light level calendars, all the different things that need to kind of come together to make the MEU compositing work workups come together cohesively. The MEU was always pushing for extending that -- or making the CHOP date earlier.

So ideal for us would be 180 days, but then when you throw in the holidays, then it kind of starts dragging to the left a little bit and the composite date is around 210. If the MEF had its way, if EOTG had its way, understandably, it would be even earlier than that, like around like 230 to 250 day mark. I think what they would love to have.

So there's a little bit of tension associated with that, not unhealthy or anything, but we just didn't see eye to eye on that necessarily. So that made it a little challenging.

So from the 3rd MAW perspective, the CG was always trying to push for that later CHOP date, and there was always a lot of back and forth between us and the MEF on trying to nail down the CHOP date. But eventually, looking at -- as the operations officer, looking at all the things they needed to do for the composite and the timelines and everything, we eventually compromised, I think, around maybe 210, maybe 215 chop date from what I, remember. So not what we desired, but we've, I think, compromised pretty well with that -- with the MEF on that.

So that's really sort of the only real, I guess, contentious issue with the MEF. And again, that's, sort of, the nature of the beast.

Internal to the 3rd MAW, command climate issues, I know that the CG was a little frustrated with the earlier CHOP date, as were the MAGs, squadrons, and dets were a little frustrated with it. But everybody understands that the challenges that we're trying to set them up for success, we're doing the MEU work ups.

So, you know, once we made the decision, everybody just

said, okay, that's not what we desire, but slapped the table on it, and that was how that that part went.

I don't know if that kind of gets close to what you're looking for, but I'll start there and kind of see where -- what else I kind of needed zero in on for you.

IO (Col (b)(3), (b)(6). Solution is No, (b)(7)(c). The items that you had are all very relevant, all very helpful. And just -- I should have stated this upfront. We are trying to do a little bit of a compare and contrast between how a division forms and supports the composite of the MEU and same with MLG, and then, obviously, it's your turn now.

And another question as far as challenges, you mentioned COVID, and you and I were in the same AOR for that, obviously. So tracking those challenges.

Now turning to force design, did you feel any pressure from the MEF or from Headquarters Marine Corps, any pressure to accelerate the experimentation of future force requirements specific to force design?

And then, the second part of that -- in support of the 15th MEU specifically -- and the second part of that question is, as a result of forced design divestitures and additions, frankly, or future additions, did that present itself as a challenge to

3rd MAW's ability to generate a properly sourced ACE for the 15th MEU?

WIT: For the 15th MEU, the only thing I can remember was at first things that we're a little bit different was the -- was trying to do the -- I am drawing a blank of what system is it.

I'm sure you know better than I do, Eric, but it's basically like trying to do the rapid refueling capability.

IO (Col  $^{\text{(b)(3), (b)(6),}}_{\text{(b)(7)(c)}}$ ): The TAGRS?

WIT: The TAGRS. Yep. And then, there was that. Now there's a little different figuration, different equipment now, which I don't think was really much of an impact on the MWSG-37 and your team, and MWSSs were all over it. And then, there's some command and control things I don't remember the specifics, like the specific types of equipment. As far as like the ACE, there were some — there's always some back and forth on the number of aircraft. Usually the skids are kind of are we going to take three Hueys or two Hueys. It's not really an issue.

And then, the only other thing I can sort of think about is maybe like with the F-35, as we're standing up the squadrons and CHOP'ing an F-35 det. I think we did that for that MEU.

IO (Col  $^{\text{(b)(3), (b)(6),}}_{\text{(b)(7)(c)}}$ ): Yes. Correct.

WIT: Yeah. I think I came out of 122, I think.

IO  $(Col_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3),(b)(6)})$ : Yeah. Sounds right.

WIT: Okay. So there was some stuff like with digital cass -- and I'm sorry, not digital cass -- like, digital fires, technology integration demonstrations. But, again, I never -- I don't remember anything like in -- while this is -- how we're gonna fit this in, or how we're going to meet this requirement, or who's driving this. I don't remember, like, force design, at that point in time and space, being like a really big problem. I don't remember feeling like any real pressure, like, they're trying to put this impossible -- the MEF is trying to put some impossible requirement on us that goes above and beyond what normal compositing of an ACE takes or requires.

IO (Col (b)(7)(c) : Yeah, no, that's very helpful, (b)(7)(c) Thanks for that.

Turning now to the MCCRE. So could you walk us through the 3rd MAW's process for certifying the composite squadron through the Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation? And if you could please specify, like, how that's conducted, who does the evaluation, and then in what form, the composite squadron all together, or was it the VMM squadron did their thing, and then

the F-35 did their MCCRE, you know, all the way down to all that type model series aircraft?

WIT: Yeah. Prior to CHOP, typically what happens is everybody does their -- everybody that's providing a unit to the composite ACE will do their own individual MCCREs individually. So they don't come together as an ACE. They don't come together, you know, at least not through anything that we direct.

So typically what will happen is the composite squadron, the core squadron, and so, in this case, VMM-164.

IO (Col (b)(7)(c) ): I think that's right.

WIT: So 164 followed, I think, kind of, the same model.

And I don't remember the time lines or anything, but somewhere prior to the chop date, they'll go on like a big DET, say like El Centro, and they'll set up all the things that they need to do for the MCCRE. We will provide from the Wing -- we run our MCCRE is, essentially, handled -- or that the people that do the evaluating, comes out of our aviation training systems directorate or division, whatever. And because it got the, essentially, got the FLSEs, the flight level standardization evaluators. Those guys are all WTIs, highly skilled, highly qualified aviators. So they will typically run the evaluation, and then they'll put together -- they'll run them through all the

MCCRE checklists, and then do the evaluation report, the debrief, and then push the report up through me and on up to the CG for signature.

And then, for the individual DETs, whether it is the skid DET, 53 DET, sometimes they will do the MCCRE just as part of a larger squadron MCCRE, or they'll do something on their own through the squadron. And same thing, they'll just have their WTI's do the evaluation, and then submit a report up the chain of command.

The real evaluation as a composite ACE, you know, you, essentially, meet all the requirements of a MCCRE once they train together, and then they do their final evaluation for the after the MEU. When we put all that together, they get a pretty thorough evaluation as a composite squadron.

So just prior to us CHOP'ing, the other thing they do is like the squadrons and the DETs will do their own of MCCRE evaluation prior to chop date.

IO  $(Col_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6)})$ : Okay. From your experience, do the squadrons and the DETs ever do a MCCRE together as a composite squadron prior to chop to the MEU? Or was that just how they did it in 3rd MAW?

WIT: No. There's -- I'll tell you, if there's something

that directs us to do that, I'm not tracking on it. And if they do come together, it's usually because they've all, sort of, like the MAG commanders come together or the MAG OpsO's come together as a squadron, and the operations have come together and said, you know, we want to pull together and do a composite evaluation of everybody together. It's nothing that we're directing or driving from the Wing.

IO (Col (b)(7)(c) : Okay. Yeah, I don't think there is any order or directive to do that. I was just curious for lessons learned, but --

WIT: So (b)(3),(b) , what I will add is that if that's one more of those things where, you know, it maybe the right thing to do, but that would be, you know, just with us trying to get to individual DETs, and then that individual themselves ready to meet the basic chop requirements and ensure that they are on a glide path that during the workups they're going to complete whatever destinations and qualifications they need to get, trying to put something like that together.

Unless there was already like I like a big wing or a MAG exercise that just naturally fit on our TEEP, it would be really hard, I think, to pull that together and find the time and the resources to be able to make that happen.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6),}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ ): Okay. Fair enough.

Wally, could you talk me through how the different parts of the ACE are selected. Is some of it driven by the force management, force sync process, and how much leeway did you have as the operations officer at 3rd MAW to make recommendations to the commanding general about, Hey, it should be this VMM squadron, combined with this skid DET, combined with this MACG DET and so on, so forth? What how much leeway did you have there?

WIT: In terms of leeway, I had tons of leeway to be able to shape who CHOP'd and went. What I would say is, so the primary driver is that force management process, and then when we start looking at, you know, what units are available and where everyone is at on their timelines and everything, it — the situation it almost drives to it to a certain, okay, that's the unit that that's most ready to go or it's their turn, if you well.

So when you start looking at deployment to dwell ratios and everything else, there's, at least during my time there at 3rd MAW, there was always sort of a natural flow. So it wasn't like we had like a whole bunch of ready players that are all chomping at the bit to go out on deployment. And now, it's like,

Okay, you know, who are we going to give the nod to go on this next one.

So it starts with the force management process, but we have -- we go to the force management process and work through that with the MEF. We have tons of ability to be able to start shuffling around units.

A great example of that is when, right after I got to 3rd MAW in 2018, the MAG-39 commanders had been pushing to see if we could shuffle around some of the VMMs, because the situation we had was that there were three the VMMs that all they were doing is just compositing and going out on MEU deployments, and then three VMMs that were going out consistently on SPMAGTF rotations. And for all the right reasons, they wanted to shuffle that around. So we worked -- we worked with the MEF, We worked through the force manager process and we switched that around.

So VMM-164 was a squadron that when they stood back up as a VMM, they did SPMAGTF and would have kept doing SPMAGTFs, but with this rotation now, we changed the squadrons around, and that's why the VMM-164 ended up becoming the ACE for 15th MEU.

We can shuffle around and everything like that. We've probably done a few times in the past, but a lot of times it's just between our UDP requirements and our MEU requirements and

SPMAGTF requirements, and then trying to give enough time in between deployments to build up the new team and build the squadron for a deployment. Like said, the solutions are almost pre-scripted for us.

But to answer your question, yeah, we have a ton of leeway and ability to switch out DETs, switch out squadrons, if we want to, and it's not hard to do. There is a process that we work through and it ends up going up to the force management, force sync conference ultimately, but we're the ones that will, a lot of times, drive that.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3),(b)(6),}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ ): Okay. Yeah, that's really helpful,  $^{(b)(3),(b)(6),}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ . I don't believe I have any other questions.

What do you have, (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)

Okay. Anything else you want to add before we get off the hook, Wally?

WIT: No, I can't think of anything. Like I said, it, you know, in general, it's just an opinion that, you know, that as a service, as the operating forces, I think we have way too much on our plate, you know? Everybody's doing the best they can to make it all work and balance all the competing requirements. Within that context, you know, like I said, I think our action with the MEF staff was really, really positive. It was challenging and,

like I said, we didn't always see eye to eye, but it always very, very positive interaction and willingness to try to, Hey, look, let's come to the best solution that we can for everybody. So that's it.

IO (Col  $^{\text{(b)(3), (b)(6)}}_{\text{(b)(7)(c)}}$ ): I appreciate it. I've got a closing comment that I'm required to say to you.

WIT: Sure.

IO (Col (b)(7)(c) ): Closing comment follows: You are requested not to discuss the interview or anything that was discussed during the interview with anyone other than members of the investigation team. If you're asked about the investigation, donot answer any questions, and please notify me or the investigating officer.

WIT: I fully understand what you told me, and I'll keep everything close.

[The investigative interview closed at 1232, 16 April 2021.]

[END OF PAGE]

I, Colonel  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}$ , attest that the preceding transcript is a true and accurate verbatim account of the interview of Colonel  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}$  (Ret.) held on 16 April 2021.

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

Col, USMC

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[The investigative interview commenced on 1415, 14 April 2021.]

[WIT: Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)

[IO: Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)

[IO: Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)

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[CR: SSgt (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)

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

]

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

and I am part of a team reviewing the facts and circumstances surrounding the formation of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, and actions and decisions associated with the material conditioning, training, and personnel readiness thereof.
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This investigation is associated with the assault amphibious vehicle mishap that occurred off San Clemente Island on 30 July 2020. We are not conducting a second investigation of the incident itself, but rather investigating from an institutional perspective to determine any changes that may be required or any actions that could or should have been implemented prior to the accident.

Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Thomas, appointed Lieutenant General Mundy on 2 April 2021 to conduct this investigation, which includes, among other things, interviewing personnel from different organizations with

information relevant to the investigation.

In front of you, (6),(b)(7)(c), you've got the convening order and another order from the Director of the Marine Corps Staff that assigned General Mundy and the rest of the team to this investigation.

As mentioned, the Staff Director of the Marine Corps,

Major General Olson, appointed me to the investigating team on

8 April 21, and Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)

I am talking to you and my

investigatory capacity as a representative of Lieutenant General

Mundy and General Thomas. We are required to provide General

Thomas with a written report upon completion of our

investigation.

I'm talking to you because the investigation team believes that you have information that may be relevant to investigation. And we'll go through how we see the MLG G-3 having relevant information as we go along. The general topics that I would like to cover with you today may include:

The formation and compositing of the 15th MEU;

Training and material readiness surrounding the formation and compositing of the 15th MEU;

I Marine Expeditionary Force oversight of the 15th MEU;
And 1st MLG's oversight of your subordinate

organizations assigned to the 15th MEU.

This is an administrative investigation. However, due to the sensitive nature of the ongoing review, we are asking personnel we talk to as part the investigation not to share anything we discuss today with any other person.

Any questions so far, (b)(3), (b) (c)?

WIT: I don't have any questions.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6)}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ ): Okay. Please state your name, rank, and current billet.

WIT: I am Colonel  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}$  . I'm the G-3 for 1st MLG.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6)}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ ): And you -- I know this sounds ridiculous because you took over from me. You were in that billet on 30 July 2020?

WIT: I was.

IO  $(\text{Col}_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6)})$ : Okay. First thing we want to talk about, Matt, is what is your perception or what is your belief on the relationship between the MSCs of the MEF and the MEF staff and the command element?

What's your day-to-day relationship between you and the MEF G-3, your action officers, your direct subordinates with their counterparts in the MEF?

Do you think there's good communication between the two

staffs?

And in particular, if you could comment on anything as it pertains to the forming and compositing of the 15t MEU.

WIT: So when I got notice of this, I went back and started looking at all my emails and all the traffic between my action officers and those action officers in the MEF G-3, as well as anything that I was personally involved with across the board, both internal to the MLG, as well as interactions that we had with the G-3 staff.

I feel comfortable that, when it comes to the MEU LOI, there is a pretty significant lift in terms of trying to make sure that that is understood across all the MSCs. So there's a lot of traffic that goes back and forth about the MEU LOI and making sure that everyone understands what the requirements are from that perspective.

And then when it comes to kind of identifying issues that we may have, obviously, if there's something that's an internal MLG issue that's not going to impact anything external on the timeline, then those things are handled in-house. But if there's a shift in the composite date, especially if they're trying to move it to the left, there's a lot of conversations that take place to make sure that, one, that we're ready to move

that chop date to the left earlier, if that's what the requirement is. And then that impacts our PTP planning and all of those lines.

I would say that -- I mean, I have a designated action officer within the G-3 that covers down specifically on MEU CLB formation and the chop. That tends to change. That assignment turns over relatively quickly just because of the amount of turnover that I've got within my G-3 staff. But it's relatively coherent. I talked to Colonel (b)(3),(b)(6),(b)(7)(c) at least on a weekly basis, usually multiple times a week. And I do the same thing for Colonel (7)(c) , where I'm talking to him at least weekly, if not multiple times every week.

So from a communication standpoint, from a planning standpoint, from just leveling the bubbles on what is going on, I don't remember any disconnects where I was surprised as an MSC leading up to the formation of the 15th MEU if that makes sense.

IO (Col (b)(7)(c) ): It does. I know you've got a lot of MEU experience. So nothing odd happened, like, timelines were generally followed as you're used to them being followed, as the MEU formed and composited?

WIT: I'm trying to remember if there was a left ship of the composite date for the 15th MEU or not. I'd have to go back and

look specifically at the email train on that one. I know that there was discussion of the 11th MEU chopping early, but I don't remember specifically. But I will tell you that, whenever we were asked, since I've been the G-3, if that would be a problem to chop early to the MEU, we looked at it, we analyzed it, and we had met or we had a plan to meet all of our requirements prior to that date.

The only thing -- when we did the chop brief for the 15th MEU, the only thing that's always attention is that when they are doing their MCCRE certification for their METS prior to chopping to the MEU, the commanders always want all the people that they're going to deploy with. They want every single person already inherent to their unit, and they want them to be part of that PTP and them to be part of the MCCRE.

But with the way personnel in going into the MEUs now, as opposed to years ago, we just were somewhat dependent on manpower to move those people at the right time. So MEU CLBs will go through there MCCREs and then at certain point they will still have people turning over. So they will have people showing up inside of their organizations after the chop date. We try and limit those to people who are not in key billets as best we can by doing PCA orders from within the MLG for those that we can

actually source.

But I would say that's not uncommon. That's not specific to the CLB-15 chopping to the 15th MEU. We had the same exact discussion with CLB-11 chopping. And I imagine when CLB-13 gets ready to chop, we'll have a very similar discussion where they will still have -- even if we stabilize them. I mean, we can still stabilize them and they're still going to get people in because they're just not -- the old way of compositing where we picked and created platoons and then organically chopped them to the MEU CLB headquarters that guaranteed that we could get the right people in place before PTP.

But now that they're victor coded, we don't have the same control over the manpower that we had before.

IO (Col (b)(7)(c) : Would you estimate that the 15 percent of CLB-15 fell in that category that you mentioned where they may have not went through a majority of the PTP before chop and didn't go through the MCCRE?

WIT: I'd have to go back and look at the specific -- I'd have to go and look at exactly what their brief was when they chopped. I've got their chop briefs, so I know what the CO reported at chop and what the manpower plan was after that.

The question is really: Where's the readiness? Is the

readiness in the cohesive core that has executed the training?

Or is it inherent to having every single person on the deck when they execute that specific aspect of it.

I mean, when you talk about postal: "Okay. I've got some postal things that I haven't accomplished because I don't have all my postal people." And that's different than maybe supply and maintenance.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6),}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ ): The shock trauma platoon or --

WIT: The shock trauma platoon is a little bit different. I don't think we've ever missed on the shock trauma platoon. The one thing that we've missed a little bit, because of the timing, is the en route care. The en route care piece for training is a requirement that's levied really from the MEF perspective and not institutionally.

So we have we're ad hoc-ing our ability to conduct a training pipeline for en route care nurses, as well as for the corpsman that are associated with that. I've actually talked to Training Command about making that institutionalized versus us having to do it through the MEF and organic means.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6),}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ ): I can help you out with that.

WIT:  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}$  is the person that I've been talking to and his team.

IO (Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)): (b)(7)(c), two questions, really. So when you come to the chop date and you've got a certain percentage of your team that is not trained in a certain requirement per the MEU LOI, how do you identify that?

WIT: I would say that they're trained to standard at the chop date because those people who were part of the organization were trained. It's the turnover after that point that is really the discussion, right.

So the commander comes up and says, I want all these people. And we work through the process to try and find them but meanwhile, they're going through their PTP and training with the people that they have on hand, even if they have individuals there that are not going to make the deployment.

IO (Col (c) So when you come up to the chop date, you have met all the requirements of that LOI. And then with the turnover of personnel after the chop date, are you aware of any waivers that the MEF may grant down to a commander, to waive certain training?

WIT: No. That doesn't come through our lines from the MSC. If that occurred, one of the things that we've paid attention to in trying to make sure that we have sufficient numbers is the underwater egress trainer. So my training officer in the G-3

worked very closely with the MEU OpsO to try and get as many people through that as we possibly could prior to chop date. And sometimes we get everybody through. And again, I'd have to go back and look specifically with the 15th MEU to see if we were able to hit that mark or not.

I feel fairly comfortable that we we're really close on the underwater egress trainer for them, from the MLG perspective. But after that point, if there's a waiver required for that specific training, that wouldn't be processed through us as the MLG. That would have gone between the MEU and the MEF.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3),\,(b)(6),\,(b)(7)}_{(c)}$  : Because it's post chop date.

WIT: Right.

IO (Col (b)(3), (b)(6). But if I remember right, Matt, only a specific portion of the CLB -- I can't remember the exact percentage, but it's not the entire --

WIT: No. It's not the entire CLB. It's EOD guys. There's a slight population that is likely to be moving across ships that has to get that. Again, I don't have the details, but I know that we and the MEU CLB, my training section and the MEU CLB OpsO track that very carefully.

No waivers were processed for CLB 15 prior to their chop date through the MLG because I've actually got their MCCRE

plan right here. So we actually used Iron Fist and this is their MCCRE confirmation brief as the venue by which they would meet all of their training requirements, which we had other MEU CLB individuals as evaluators and that all really executed underneath the umbrella of the commanding officer for CLR 17.

There were three areas where they didn't get MCCRE'd during this because that wasn't part of the exercise design. And that was ECC, HSTs, and air delivery. So we aligned to those capabilities to WTI and they were evaluated and MCCRE'd during a WTI. So between Iron Fist and WTI, we gave CLB 15 really everything they needed to be able to hit all their training requirements before they chopped.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6),}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ ): Okay.

WIT: And I was in communication with Colonel Bronzi close to the WTI because there was some pressure. Long story short, we had RECLAMA'd our ability to supply a CLB to WTI because I didn't have any CLBs left to be able to apply against that SLTE event.

So there was a potential for us to be somewhat forced to send CLB to go be the CLB for WTI -- and I didn't want to do that -- which would then put a lot of pressure on the JLTI and the chop date over to the MEU, which we didn't want to do.

So we isolated CLB 15 away from that and said, "you're

not going to go do this, but you're going to support these training events under WTI because they're essential for your pre-chop training requirements." So I went back and forth with Colonel Bronzi to make sure that, if for some reason we were forced to do that, he understood the background behind it, but we had general officer top cover, so it didn't happen.

IO (Col $_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6)}$ ): So was CLB 15, the unit that supported UAE -- I'm sorry. Native Fury.

WIT: That was CLB 13 that did Native Fury.

IO (Col (b)(7)(c) : A couple more questions, Matt. So my understanding is that 15th MEU had a few more additional capabilities than the normal MEU, specifically the all do main reconnaissance, HIMARS, the desire to bring CRRCs and perhaps a different variant of a rubber boat.

Were you feeling, as MLG G-3, pressure or requirements from the MEF related to the 15th MEU or just writ large to demonstrate proficiency in future force capability, specifically force design, emerging stuff?

WIT: No. I wasn't feeling any pressure from the MEU to -the only area that I would comment on with regards to that
specific question has nothing to do with feeling pressure. We
got Bridge Company deactivated during that timeframe and we had

year to deactivate the Bridge Company. But General Shea was like, "Look. Why would I want to spend money on maintaining this capability for a year? Let's deactivate it now." And so that happened to coincide with a similar time where they were looking for more CRRCs. And so within the Bridge Company, they have a similar capability, so my conversation with the G-3 and my conversation with Colonel Bronzi was, "look. Here are some things that are available."

And in discussion with Lieutenant Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(6), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c).

Shea, and the MEF, we were identifying the minimum training requirements we would have as an MLG, given the force design decisions, and what then would we have available to give t Division in support of giving the 15th MEU the boats that they wanted to be able to deploy with. So it wasn't pressure, it was more about a win-win. We were deactivating a company happens to have these assets. So if they're helpful, then take them and use them because we no longer have a requirement for them because we're deactivating the company.

So that was really the only intersection between what you're talking about and things that I did or we did as an MLG.

IO (Col $_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6)}$ ): So specifically, you're talking about like providing some, like, engine mechanics and --

WIT: It was really just the material.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6),}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ ): So no personnel?

WIT: No personnel. I mean, there was a lot of discussion about the fact that 1142 were a hot commodity. And I think we did add another 1142 to CLB-15 as an augment to them based off of the fact that they were taking out more boats. But I'd have to go back and look exactly at the chop brief to see what we augmented them with. But again I wouldn't classify any of that as pressure. It was like, "okay. I understand what the decision has been about how the 15th MEU is forming and what capabilities that they want to take out with them. I am aware of the deficiencies that they have, in terms of materials. I have something that might help them." We tried to make that line up as best we could.

IO (Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)): Impacts due to COVID? I mean, it sounds like a pretty smooth work up to the chop date. Did COVID add any additional stressors that you saw as problematic or was it just, "Okay. This just another hurdle we're dealing with"?

WIT: I would certainly say that our bandwidth, as an organization, was partially consumed by dealing with COVID because it was an unknown.

At that point, as an organization, we were creating a

stability ward, a 250-bed stability ward and attaching it to the Naval Hospital, as well as augmenting their ER with med battalion personnel, so that they could handle a big influx of COVID patients if that happened.

We were concerned about getting DSCA tasks that would take all that capability away from I MEF. And General Osterman at the time was like, "Look. I've got two hotspots. I've got L.A. and I've got San Diego, and we're sitting right between them. If we're going to preserve readiness and potentially support the communities around Camp Pendleton, the right answer isn't to send our people out to the hospitals out in town. Our answer is to take care of them internally."

I would not say that most of our attention on forming CLB 15 and taking care of CLB 15 happened prior to that. So my planning horizon for chopping a unit and making sure that unit is taken care of is generally three to six months before the actual chop date. So that's kind of our window where we pay a lot of attention to them and make sure they're lined up and ready to go. And then we kind of sit there and overwatch as they're going through that plan to take care of any hiccups. And then if there's any last minute equipment or personnel or -- specific

with en route care training, like if there's something that we need to do at our level to lock down specific training events for individuals, that's our overwatch role after we kind of setup the plan and monitor it.

Right at chop is where we pay a lot of attention to the equipment piece. And so thinking back with CLB 15, specifically, there was some trucks, I think, that he identified as needing to be swapped out. We prepped to be able to swap those out, but then we put a Tiger Team together from the G-4 to go over and look at the equipment. And we actually were able to fix -- I believe we fixed two of the trucks and got them up to the code that they need to be at, and the commander was comfortable with the trucks. And then we did -- I think we did swap one, maybe two trucks specifically.

So the short answer to your question is: No, I don't think COVID inhibited our ability to be able to pay attention to either the PTP or the specific at chop or CLB 15. But there was certainly a bandwidth that was taken away because we were doing other missions at the exact same time, but I don't think it interfered.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}$ ): One of the comments you just made about the trucks going down and then you sending a Tiger Team down to

work them and get them back up. Was that during the JLTI process or just before the JLTI process?

WIT: It was right before chop. So our goal was to make sure that it was done right before chop, so it would have been within that JLTI window.

IO (Col (c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)): So, I do want to put words in your mouth. Is it common or uncommon that you've got vehicles in a lesser condition code going into JLTI and then you'll surge to fix those vehicles and get them fixed within a couple days to get through JLTI and chop to the MEU?

WIT: Would say I was not happy with the way this went down because of the way the commander held onto them until the last minute. My preference would have been that he identified these as candidates in advance, so that we were postured. So now they may have been identified before they came up to my level.

So when I'm talking about my level, I'm talking about the O-6 level. I got involved as an O-6 because it came to my level. Now, it may have been percolating at a lower level prior to that, but it came up to my level close to the chop date. And so I was making decisions about, "Okay. Do this, do this, do this." And I was talking to other commanders who had those assets to make sure that they knew that they on top to swap out

and give good assets to the CLB.

And so that didn't happen with other MEUs, new CLBs that I've chopped to. It wasn't this "at the last minute 0-6s get involved." I would have to go back and look exactly and see what we did for the other MEU CLBs. I'm sure that we want them to leave with good equipment. And if it means we swap out the equipment and give them really good equipment, then that's what we do.

And honestly, General Shea's guidance from the time that she's been in command has been, "Anybody who is deploying gets the absolute best equipment that any of the sourcing commands have." And there's no questions. And that's guidance to all the commanders. That's guidance to the staff. And it's well understood. People is not far behind that she's willing to take and do some pretty drastic things with people, if that's what the requirement is. But she's also very interested in making the system work.

So what have we done with M&RA to change the way that they're planning to move people, right. What have we engaged at the sergeant major level with. What have we engaged with at the O-6 level. And then last resort, what do we need to get her to do with General Borgschulte or whoever is in charge to change the

way Manpower is supporting the deploying unit.

And that's kind of how we treat all of our units that are deploying. So CLB 7 going, we put them on the side of the force management tool, so that would then trigger Headquarters Marine Corps processes to let everybody know that these guys are going and deploying UDP. And then we sit there and we watch how that's being supported. If it's not being supported, well, then the chief gets involved. I don't typically get involved with personnel.

IO (Col  $^{\text{(b)(3), (b)(6),}}_{\text{(b)(7)(c)}}$ ): How do you watch it?

WIT: Through the normal staff processes. So we have IPRs leading up to their deployment date where the deploying commander will come in and brief the CG. It's not, like, a monthly thing. It's usually D-120 and then D-30. But we try and do it so that if something is bad, if something's not going right, we have enough time to fix it before they go. We want to give decision space to the CG. We want to make sure we have decision space in case we do.

But some issues percolate through the action officers and I become aware of them through the action officers. And I give guidance to the action officers, and then it goes away I don't really ever get involved. Sometimes they come up and I

have to start calling commanders, but that's not normal. For me to need to do that, "hey, look, this is how we need to fix the problem with the trucks," that wasn't a normal occurrence for it to get up to my level.

IO (Col  $^{\text{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}}$ : Thank you. That's very helpful.

IO (Col (b)(3), (b)(6), (c) (b)(3), (b) (6), (b)(7)(c) you talked specifically about how COVID impacted CLB 15 chop to 15th MEU. But can you speak a bit more broadly how has 1st MLG writ large been impacted, specific to training readiness. Have you seen a huge degradation or is it --

WIT: I think at first we thought we were going to see a huge degradation across all of the units. But some of the techniques that we used to try and limit people in place -- going port and starboard; morning shift, night shift; Alpha team, Bravo team -- getting in there and working through it. We didn't really see a whole lot of degradation across the board from a holistic standpoint.

The nice thing about the MLG is that you're doing your job and you're training your job at the same time. So within your maintenance community, supply community, within your engineering community, you're training while you're doing the things that you need to do.

So the one unit that had issue was CLB 13, because we assign them to run the MIOC, which was the Marine Isolation

Center. And that was set up so that any unit on Camp Pendleton, if they couldn't support a COVID positive person within their barracks, then they would drop them off with us and we would provide wraparound services for them. So we watched them really lose their sustainment training intervals over the nine months that they were attached to it.

Originally, the commander was trying to kind of do some training over here while he was running the MIOC, and that was right before the at-sea period for the 15th MEU when they the Navy started doing sentinel testing and dropping all of those people off. So we were caught a little bit off guard from a management process of running that site, when they started dumping hundreds of people on us.

IO (Col $^{(b)(3), (b)(6),}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ ): And that sentinel testing, that was the random COVID testing.

WIT: Yes. I mean, my understanding is that they tested everybody on ship. So they went through and did a unit sweep on the ship. And anybody who tested positive, whether you're symptomatic or asymptomatic, basically left the ship.

So they started moving people like crazy off the ship

and we ended up having to -- that was not in the July timeframe.

That was later on. So that was in the fall when that happened.

IO  $(Col_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6),})$ : Fall of '20.

WIT: Before they deployed, yes. That was before they deployed to their second -- when they did their combined at-sea period. So that didn't happen in July. That happened in the fall. So CLB-13's degradation dropped pretty good down to where they were really T-4 and then we got them out to WTI. So we assigned them to WTI and we closed the MIOC. So they were on a steady progression back up on that.

But again, we're watching all of that through the DRRS process, right. We're talking to the units, watching the DRRS reports that they're giving across the board. And then whatever they identify as things that are inhibiting their ability to get training, then we, as a staff address, those things.

IO  $(Col_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6)})$ : Copy. Any funding issues O&M decrements that was adversely affecting the material or training Marines for 1st MLG?

WIT: I would say no, for FY20. FY19, FY20, I would say no, none during that time frame simply because TAD funds weren't being spent, so we were able to move money around. The RIP and the SMU got incremental funding, right, like we'd like them to.

So we ended up fiscally, from a MEF support account, being really healthy during that timeframe. I think when you look at the readiness figures across the board, specifically Delta TAMCNs, you'll see that we're actually in pretty decent shape, surprisingly, across Delta TAMCNs.

Now, FY21 has been a different story because the MEF got a \$26 million mark against its budget and that came out of the MEF support account. So some of the discussion that, you know, General Heckl and General Shea have been having is, "okay. We've got good readiness right now. We're taking hits in the MEF support account because we've got good readiness right now." So there's a trade off there in making sure that the training still goes because we're taking a hit in the MEF support accounts because our readiness is good.

If our readiness was bad, then there might be some different decisions being made at the GO level. But right now, they're supporting more training at the cost of the MEF support accounts.

IO  $(Col_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6)})$ : To a certain degree you're getting punished for success at keeping stuff up. And whether it's because -- I'd be curious to know your opinion -- whether stuff has been sitting and it's not been identified as an issue or --

WIT: No. We're seeing the service requests come -- I mean, especially for FY21, Steel Knight happened, and all of a sudden we see -- a month and a half later we start seeing all the stuff that got punished during Steel Night come through the system.

So I don't think that this stuff is just sitting there. I think it's being used across the MEF. I can't speak to AAVs specifically. I don't have visibility at my level on the AAV piece over FY20 or FY21. I couldn't speak to that from where I sit. John Wiener may be able to from the G-4 perspective because he sits -- well, actually he wouldn't have been here in the lead up to the 15th MEU chop because it would have been (c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7) (c) that would have been running our material readiness piece out of the G-4. So and then we also had CLR-15 running it out at the same time.  $^{\text{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}}$ (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , those guys would have had their thumb on MEF readiness across kind of that timeframe, more so than me. And what I know is more tangential because I'm sitting in the meetings, not because I'm directly involved.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6),}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ ): Let me look through my list here. I don't --

WIT: I would say that just on the topic of material readiness, I think we, last year, fiscal year '20, did a really

good job with having CLR-15 do engagements with Division, do engagements with the regimental commanders, do engagements with the MAW to identify problem areas that we saw from our monitoring of the reports while also listening to the supported commander's priorities and then attacking whatever problem that team came together and identified.

So I don't remember anything specific with their tracks as a lean forward engagements specifically with their tracks.

But if there was a problem that was identified, either by us or by them, we would have addressed it with our capabilities.

IO (Col (b)(7)(c) ): Yes.

WIT: I just don't know if that happened.

IO (Col (b)(7)(c) ): My time at 1st MLG, I remember specifically that Division asked for some Delta TAMCNS that was, of course, 2018, 2019 until you came in. There was some random Bravo TAMCNs issues that I remember, and then there seemed to be like some one-offs with AAVs. But it seemed to be -- being the same position, it like seemed like a minor pain in the ass issue, and that's just my random recall.

WIT: The point I'm trying to make is that we were postured.  $\text{IO } (\text{Col}_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3),\,(b)(6),}) \colon \text{ Sure.}$ 

WIT: We have processes in place to address the supported

command's concerns. We monitor that from our perspective. We'd look at the prints and we look for trends, but that's only as good as the prints are, right. So if the prints aren't accurate, we won't know that there's something that needs to be addressed. So we watch the prints and we listen to the supported command, and then we take action where that comes together.

But if we don't see it in the prints and the supported command doesn't tell us, then we don't know that we need to take action. But I guess that's important for me to kind of transmit in this audience, because we have processes in place from the MLG perspective. And we execute that routinely to be able to make sure that if there is a division unit that's going out to do something, whether it's an exercise or deploy that we're postured.

So even when this return to water ops started happening, this discussion, General Shea looked at me and she said, Make sure that the Division G-4 knows that we're postured to make sure that 3/5 -- I think is the unit that needs to deploy -- make sure that they are able to train to standard so that they don't go untrained when they deploy.

IO  $(\text{Col}_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6)})$ : -- to go to the 31st, right? WIT: Yes. So anyway, I'm just using that as an example of,

we have processes in place and we're in a three-point stance to go and help. We just need to be launched.

IO (Col (c) (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7) : I don't have any more questions.

IO (Col (b)(7)(c) ': Yes. I don't either, Matt. Anything else you want to offer or any suggestions you have for MEU -- I know you've got a lot of experience here forming and compositing -- from your viewpoint that the MEF should or could do to make this process more seamless or more effective?

WIT: The MEU LOI is a beast. I mean, that is an absolute beast of a document, and I hate it. I've read it multiple times and identify conflicts because the way it's generated is that every staff section has their fingers in it. So there's contradictory information in it and there's this and there's that.

I know that every time the chop of the MEU LOI comes out, we try and make it better from that perspective. But I would argue that that document has gotten to be such a beast that I'm not sure exactly how helpful it is. It's just a beast.

IO  $(\text{Col}_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6)})$ : That's actually really helpful. Because frankly, there was -- you read the UET requirements, there is some contradiction in different documents. And I can tell you, when I sat in your seat, I had a conversation with my boss about

what are the requirements.

WIT: I mean, it got to the point where I saw stuff in there and I called them the MEU OpsO. I'm like, "Hey. You know that we don't have this right?"

He's like, "No. I just thought everybody has these," right, from a sourcing perspective. Because you know that not every person has an RCO or not every person has this piece of equipment in the MLG. We're just not manned and trained and equipped that way. And that's his input into MEU LOI, because that person thinks this.

And so it takes me going back and saying, Is this a requirement because of what, or is this just somebody's opinion, right. And, at that point, the MEU OpsO didn't know that the MLG didn't have one of these items per Marine, like the Division does. He just assumed it. But there was no requirement for every Marine in the CLB to have that piece of gear. So it's those kinds of things that we're constantly trying to work through, and so it's just it's a beast.

And everybody who gets involved in it and has the best of intentions, but sometimes you need multiple college degrees just to be able to kind of work through it. So that would be my only comment to them.

I think our communication in terms of how my staff and how the MEU staff works across the training lines -- if I've got a training problem for any of my deploying units it is a belly button. There is a person on the MEF G-3 staff that we can talk to who helps us. And if he can't help us, then -- for example, the en route care stuff, we were going through the MEF surgeon. And the MEF surgeon was using his contacts to be able to get two and two together to make it work.

So I don't think that there's a -- I don't see a disconnect between us identifying requirements and the MEF staff working those requirements to make sure that our deploying units, whether it's a MEU CLB or somebody else, get what they need. I haven't seen a problem there.

IO  $(Col_{(b)(7)(c)}^{(b)(3),(b)(6)})$ : Copy. One last thing. I'm sorry.

How would you characterize GFM requirements levied on MLG: overwhelming, workable, does it enable your units enough time to train and meet required training standards? And, please, over the years you've been associated with an MLG, have you seen it go up and down?

WIT: I think we're very sustainable right now, when you look at flags. So there's a difference between flags and there's CLDs. The CLDs we composite and push out for TSC events, like

Koa Moana, or even if we're going out to support Special Purpose MAGTF Central Command, those aren't flags. So you're not tracking dwell by flag.

I think what I'm posturing right now is the MEF commander has prioritized getting Western International Dateline. So the MRFD rotation, the CTF 75 augmentation with 7th ESBs, the TSC events that are going in and working in our priority countries that we need to work with that freedom banner, which is the NPF operation in Guam that we're trying to do. All of those things have a high priority and it's not difficult for us to be able to manage the force generation requirements for those things.

Where there becomes a conflict, is with SLTE. We have more than enough opportunity to go up the hill and participate in SLTEs. I've got units that are hitting their sustainment intervals multiple times a year because of SLTE program and the fact that you've got to MLGs supporting three SLTEs, very similar to what we saw with the MWSS's where there's plenty of opportunity there. And sometimes it's too much opportunity for us. So I think if we talk about prioritizing GFM over SLTE, then where we potentially take risk, if we're going to take risk, is in SLTE or potentially production requirements at home station.

So one of the things that we've been careful about is making sure that the all of the units in the MLG understand what our priorities are for force generation. And those things are in concert with the MEF priorities, which are in concert with the Marine Corps priorities as far as what has a higher priority than others. The tricky part has always been SLTE, right, because we're out there supporting SLTE while we're also getting training at SLTE facility.

But if we're not out there supporting the SLTE, then
the SLTE doesn't go, even if we don't need the training
associated with the SLTE. So that's where we end up having
friction. But we've prioritized it and we've communicated the
priorities very clearly. And to my point earlier, everyone
thought that we would find just somebody to go do the WTI. And I
was like, no, I messaged that for an entire nine months. I'm not
signing up to do this because I don't have anybody.

And they never took me seriously and they never went and actually forced a solution on it. And so at the last minute, they're like, "We need a CLB." I'm like, "I can give you some IAs, but I can't give you a CLB." And so we take that really seriously. So the one area that I've got some concern on is that we're taking over the GESP mission for MRFD within I MEF, so the

Ground Equipment Support platoon. So MRFD runs in two cycles, one is the Ground Equipment Support Platoon, which goes during the wet season, and the MRFD during the dry season.

So MARFORPAC aligned the whole program underneath I MEF as of next fiscal year. And so then we have the Competition and Deterrence Task Force, which is a RFS or RFF from CENTCOM that is the next Special Purpose MAGTF Central Command Crisis Response. So there's no decision on whether the service is going to support that requirement. And we're not expecting a decision at the service level for that until June.

Well, that unit will have to deploy to replace the current team that's out there at the end of the fiscal year, which puts us in a fairly tight crunch to be able to do that. Then if that gets continued, I can potentially see two CLDs for CENTCOM, the GESP, the battalion for MRFD all deployed at the same time doing RIPs. And that's basically in the January, February timeframe of next year.

So from a PTP perspective, we'll be able to cover it all. And where we're going to take the hit head is in our maintainers, because Maintenance Battalion has to support all of those things. So instead of having 12 people on the bench, we're only going to have six people on the bench. So we're

communicating what we think the decrement to MEF readiness is going to be if we have to cover down on all these things.

And I know I'm answering a different question than what you asked, so let me go back. There is potential that we will have to do force generation in a short timeline if we get tasked with the Competition Deterrence Task Force. We're aware of it. There's some guidance from the Commandant that has come out and we're going to do our best to posture ourselves to be ready should we get tested to do this.

We won't shortchange them, right. That's not how we operate. We won't shortchange them. We'll do what we need to do to make sure that they have everything they need to deploy. So the answer to the specific question you asked are your GFM requirements stressing you from a PTP perspective, which is no, because we're taking hit in production, right.

We're isolating these people away from the daily production that is required for MEF readiness and we're making sure that those guys are ready to go at the cost of MEF readiness potentially. We're predicting, during certain timeframes, that there's a three to five percent decrease in readiness, depending on what TAM time you're talking about, so Alpha through Echo, and the same thing for order-ship time and supply timelines. We're

predicting that those are going to lengthen because our intermediate supply support folks are either training or they're deployed. But that's the balance for us, and we're communicating that to the MEF. And as long as that's an acceptable cost to the MEF, then we keep doing business that way.

IO (Col  $^{\text{(b)(3), (b)(6),}}_{\text{(b)(7)(c)}}$ ): I don't have anything else.

WIT: No. The only thing that we've learned with COVID,

I'll say this, is that we've added on about another two months to

our PTP.

So based off of ROM, based off of other things, we've backed up our formations of these units and giving them people almost two months because of ROM requirements and things like that, just to compensate for that so that we don't short change.

IO (Col  $^{\text{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}}$ : So is that a lesson learned from this 15th MEU?

WIT: No. We just not so much from the 15th MEU part as it was from the CLD that went out to Special Purpose MAGTF. So we did force generation for a CLD over the summer and we actually didn't send them on a pre-deployment site survey because we couldn't afford the ROM requirements on the front end or the back end of that PDSS. So we said, "you're going to have to do this virtually because we can't afford you being away from this PTP

program prior to your deployment."

So our way of mitigating the fact that we didn't have as much time as we wanted was we canceled pre-deployment site surveys, not PTP events, right. So they still hit all the PTP events that they needed to prior to deployment, but they didn't get the benefits of a site survey.

IO  $(\text{Col}_{(c)}^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}$ : And so for the 15th MEU composite, two months added on PTP as buffer?

WIT: MEUs are a little bit different because of the chop date and because they are standing multifunctional battalions.

Because a MEU is a standing multifunctional, I don't really have to composite it. We just follow the chop date. It's these units that I have to create on an ad hoc basis where I've had to backup that. Now, we also did it for CLB 7. But I have to composite CLB 7 because they don't have all the capabilities inherent to their organization for them to be a multifunctional CLB. So I attached capabilities to them early so that they can get all the training that they were supposed to get.

- IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6),}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ ): So similar to like a BLT?
- IO (Col $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}$ ): Compositing for a MEU with difference attachments coming into it.
  - IO (Col  $^{\text{(b)(3), (b)(6),}}_{\text{(b)(7)(c)}}$ ): And clarify, CLB 7 is for MRFD?

WIT: Correct. That's one impact from COVID that we've had to adjust to. We've added time to PTP to account for ROM. Two weeks is a long time. I mean, if you get hit for two weeks worth of ROM where you're not training, it's a lot of time. And so we had to account for that.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3),\,(b)(6),}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ ): Assuming that's your only ROM too.

WIT: Right. And we don't assume that. Again, we also look at the timelines within the holiday periods, right. So we know that Marine Corps Ramadan is going to have an impact, so we add additional time on to compensate the lack of opportunity to train during in that time frame as well.

So we take things like that into account when we identify the timeline to form. That's all internal MLG stuff. I mean, we're doing that so that we can meet the requirements.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3),\,(b)(6),}_{(b)(7)(c)}$ ): We're going to let you go, Matt.

I do have a statement I got to read to you though. You are directed not to discuss the interview or anything that was discussed during the interview with anyone other than members of the investigation team. If you are asked about the investigation, do not answer any questions and you immediately notify me or your commanding general.

WIT: Okay.

[The investigative interview concluded at 1510, 14 April 2021.]

I, Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , attest that the preceding transcript is a true and accurate verbatim account of the interview of Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) held on 14 April 2021.

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

Col, USMC

[The Investigative Interview commenced on 1707, 21 April 2021.]

[WIT: BGen T. Savage]

[IO: LtGen C. Mundy]

[CR: SSqt (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)

LtGen Mundy: This is Lieutenant General Mundy. I'm here with Brigadier General Tom Savage, the Deputy Commanding General of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force.

So, Tom, just as a scene setter and for context, the months leading up to this incident reflect typical life in the operating forces in the Fleet Marine Force, as well as extraordinary events such as COVID and other factors. And I acknowledge that the cumulative demand on staff bandwidth as well as on the ability to provide leadership oversight, to help jog your memory of the environment in early 2020, I'm just going to review a few of these efforts.

The reaction to the Soleimani strike and the killing of Soleimani, and the need to focus on supporting CONPLAN-1420, security for support to the *U.S.N.S. Mercy* support, Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, modifications to ITX 2-20. I think it was canceled or rerolled into something else. And then later on, 15th MEUs realistic urban training (RUT); force

generation requirements; the ordinary GFM stuff for INDOPACOM and CENTCOM, which included sourcing units for MRF-D, SPMAGTF-CR-CC, and the 31st MEU Unit Deployment Program. Also, Native Fury, the compression of the ARG/MEU workups from three to two at-sea periods. The response to COVID, and we'll talk more about that as we go through this. Planning and executing Force Design

Initiatives, including divestitures as well as the creation of new units and some unit organizational changes; for example, the 15th MEU was a new MEU was moving us toward the 2030 MEU. With that as a backdrop for the record, please describe your duties and responsibilities as the deputy commander in particular. If you had a role formally or informally with regards to the MEUs, what was it?

BGen Savage: Okay, So when I took over here -- I guess, previously under -- maybe even when you were here, but under General Craparotta, certainly the deputy general -- deputy commanding general was given a specific portfolio. And when I got here, General Osterman, specifically didn't give me a specific portfolio.

He said he wanted to be able to fill in when he was gone or he would fill in when was gone and know what was going on

across the MEF. But I was going to be the face down the waterfront, so that made me kind of lead for naval integration.

At that time, it actually went through my mind because I thought I was going to be the MEU guy, and I just was coming to terms of the fact that I didn't actually have command of anything because we don't have a MEB. About that time as I was coming in, I found out also that I was the reporting senior for every colonel in the MEF, except for the chief of staff. So that kind of broadened my portfolio a little bit more, if you know what I mean. All these guys worked for me, so I had to pay attention to them.

Having said that, as we started to form, or at least the command element for the 15th MEU, I took an active interest in it. And from the get-go, you know, after the turnover I was talking multiple times a week to Colonel Bronzi. And after he actually took command, we had a weekly SITREP that he would send me and multiple touch points during most weeks. I'd say we talk at least once a week, if not three or four time so. But my role was, but I was also the RS for the SPMAGTF. So I was looking at those guys, for the MIG, and all those subordinate battalions.

And then, as I said, all the rest of the staff. So I was General Osterman's alter eqo.

And prior to COVID, both of us were traveling a lot. So there would be times where I would be, not running the MEF, but like holding down the fort while he was gone, taking every brief when he was here, I was like the pre-brief guy. So I'm the guy that would get deep into stuff and prep it and let the staff bounce it off me before I went to the boss. So I get a little bit deeper before it went to the boss and stuff, which was kind of how I saw my role.

LtGen Mundy: Did you have the same sort of role with the 11th MEU? I don't think you were here when the 11th MEU was here.

BGen Savage: The 11th MEU was out and coming back. As Fred came back, then I started rolling in and working through decomposite and all that stuff.

LtGen Mundy: So this was the First Marine Expeditionary
Unit workup and PTP for you, that overlapped in your time here
as the --

BGen Savage: Yes, sir. LtGen

Mundy: -- Deputy MEF

Commander?

Just so I know, where were you on the 30th of July 2020, during the incident, were you out at sea?

BGen Savage: No. I was over at my house with the

Commandant and General Rutter and General Heckerling, General
Osterman getting ready to do that. We're entertaining the
Commandant because the boss was changing his house. So it was for
the change of command for the MEF.

LtGen Mundy: Let's move on now. So near the end of 2019 and the first six months of 2020, what types of challenges or just generally, what were the challenges that I MEF and its MSCs experienced? How would you just describe those challenges?

BGen Savage: Well, I'd say that pre -- I think through this, but really, I mean, you've got the Marine Corps Ramadan period where everything is just chaotic because you got too much time off and too much stuff to do. Post-Ramadan, we had Steel Knight going on. The boss had to go to a Harvard seminar. I was out at MARFORPAC conference in Hawaii. We were planning for the Native Fury, so we were beginning that, where I started meeting with my FCE. We were planning and we did a CPX to get ready for MEFEX and Bronzi was getting ready to Iron Fist, which happened early in the next year.

And then, you roll into Christmas. We were actually fairly busy. I didn't take any leave. I was here. And then, the New Year started, and we had all the normal GFM stuff, all stuff that you brief, to include MEFEX on top of that. And then,

the Soleimani strike hit.

So as far as how all that affected the MSCs, I can just tell you how it affected me and the MEF staff, but it was probably one of the busiest times of my life. We're planning for 14-22, 10-22, whatever you want to call it. We're planning for Native Fury. Those overlapped a little bit, but not really.

We're getting ready to do MEFEX, and again, as far as the MEU goes, Bronzi was in the middle of working up to Iron Fist. As part of the 10-22 planning, if you remember, sir, towards the end of January, I took off to fly to see you, and then I went to Bahrain to talk to 51/5 and Fifth Fleet. And then I did a little bit in-country before we came back. So I was gone, I think, eight to ten days.

We came back at some point -- I can't remember if it was before we left for that, whatever you want to call it PDSS as a recon tour over to CENTCOM afterwards. But General Osterman made the decision because of this Soliemani thing, and the chance that I might have to go forward with the MEF forward that we're going to change the MEFEX to a MEBEX. So then, I was in charge of the MEBEX is what the event became.

So that was kind of -- that and the 10-22 planning was kind of all consuming.

LtGen Mundy: And when was the MEBEX?

BGen Savage: The MEBEX was right before -- it was the middle of February, and then like the day that thing ended was around the 26th of February, and that's when I flew out to visit you guys one more time before I went forward to do Native Fury. So we met in a right, a certain met there. That's where, sir.

LtGen Mundy: So we met in UAE.

BGen Savage: Right, sir. Yes, sir.

LtGen Mundy: It's 14-22, just for the record. That's the CONPLAN. So 10-22 is an older plan.

So again, kind of going now deeper into 2020, I'm assuming you would describe it sort of the same way? We're just very busy with all this stuff going on, and you were away at Native Fury. We'll get to that here in just a minute. I'm gonna ask you about that too.

But how did you see these challenges, being busy, as you said, just from the MEF perspective? Did that impact the training or material readiness of any I MEF units, based on what you saw then?

BGen Savage: No, not from what I saw then. And I don't know if we're talking pre-Native Fury or if you're post-Native Fury?

LtGen Mundy: Kind of a sweep. A whole sweep of time.

BGen Savage: So not any more than I normally would then. There was a lot of all staff churn. And for the MEBEX, we did have participation from the MSCs, but I didn't see that as hugely impacting what they were doing.

Now the staffs were planning. The staffs from all the MSCs were helping to plan 10 -- I'm sorry.

LtGen Mundy: 14-22.

BGen Savage: I used to I used to work on 10-22 20 years ago, sir. So yeah, they were -- the staffs were involved in doing that, even down at the MSC level. We were more so heavily in my mind. But the GFM process was still ongoing. People were still training. You know, we were still executing like you do as the MEF.

It was -- as you know, when we were out at Native Fury, that's when COVID hit and that's when things got even weird out there, but even weirder back here. And that consumed a lot bandwidth when we came back. And I have to assume because of the bubble to bubble stuff we had to do, and the ROM requirements, and just the chaos of the conflicting guidance as we came back that that had some impact on what the MSCs were doing.

But part of the craziness when we came back also was we had

Three, like, OPSINTELs a week that were focused on COVID. And General Osterman was pretty adamant about asking, does this have any operational impact? Are you having any operational training impact? And across the board, in my memory, that the MSC commanders or their representatives and whatever brief we're in said, No, we're good. It's got, you know -- it's got minimal impact and we're able to accomplish everything.

We did have to cancel WTI, as I recall. We did have to re-whicker an ITX, and I'm sure that created challenges. And then, you described RUT, we had to redo our whole RUT for the MEU.

EtGen Mundy: Moved it on base as opposed to out in town?

BGen Savage: We couldn't do out of town. We weren't up in

Yuma like we want to be. We're not Twentynine Palms. We did almost the whole thing in the area here. So they got all their training reps in, but that was significant — again, for the staffs, that was a significant, to including EOTG, I mean, we had to jump through our ass to get that thing up and running and ready to go in a timely fashion.

And then for the MEU, specifically, and we spent a lot of time talking about this. There was this, okay, what are we doing for ROM requirements. And then this thing came out that

are we're going to combine them into one at sea period. That decision was slow and coming, and we ended up with a PMINT and then a break, and then the ARG/MEU and COMPTUEX combined.

So all that stuff was taking up bandwidth, and then the changing requirements of what we were supposed to do. Was it 14 days of ROM? Seven days ROM? Are we ROM'ing for PMINT? Are we not ROM'ing for PMINT? RFIs coming in at the rapid rate every time we get somebody — and this — I'm speaking now for Chris Bronzi because I speak with him all the time. But I mean, between him and the commodore, they were constantly having to field higher headquarters. You know, how did this guy get it? How many people did he have close contact with? All that stuff was going on during that period.

LtGen Mundy: When you say higher headquarters, was it the MEF and CPF through Third Fleet? Or I mean, who was driving that?

BGen Savage: To my recollection, the real top driving force was PAC Fleet and then Third Fleet had a say on it too, and then ESG-3 just kind of responded to whatever --

LtGen Mundy: ESG-3. Excuse me.

So let me just ask you about Native Fury. When were you gone? When were you forward in Bahrain and UAE?

BGen Savage: Think it was the 26 of February I left to go -- you know, first I hit Tampa before I went out there, and it was either the 6th or 7th of April when I got back.

LtGen Mundy: So you were a true deputy and General Osterman said, I want you to be -- kind of, looking broadly over the whole MEF when you're here, and then you focus down and then you did MEBEX, and then Native Fury. While you were gone, were you aware of General Osterman specifically tasking anybody to kind of help provide oversight of areas that you normally would be looking at? Or to help with this? Or was it just kind of gapped?

BGen Savage: I don't know if he did, but I had, in my view, it's bit of an exaggeration to say it was gapped, because Bronzi had such a tight relationship with all the members of the staff, and members of staff were involved in it, too. And he was still, you know, still getting SITREPs out there, trying the best that I could. Which, you know, during Native Fury wasn't a lot, but I was trying the best way I could to make sure that he had everything taken care of. But he's very tight with the Chief of Staff. He was great with the G-3 and G-4. So my feeling was that he was getting what he needed.

And then after I got out a ROM -- I went back and looked at my calendar to see what I was doing when I got back out

of ROM. The very first day I got back out of ROM, I sat down with Bronzi for an hour and a half to see how he was doing. This was post-formation because I didn't get out of ROM until after they formed, but to see what his issues and concerns were and everything else.

LtGen Mundy: And what were they?

BGen Savage: The same type of things they always were. We would talk about ship maintenance. As I recall, we had a problem with the flight deck on the *Makin Island* to take F-35s. We talked about RIB's. We talked about small boats. We talked a lot about COVID, and how we were going to adjust the schedules for COVID. And again, I went back to his old SITREPs, too. And he didn't raise any concern about the readiness of the MSEs. I shouldn't say that. He did about personnel at one point. But by and large, I think he got what he got, and he was generally happy with what he got when the team formed.

LtGen Mundy: So another, kind of, twist on the earlier point you made about being busier than you've ever been, or one of the busiest times, did you ever feel like the MEF in particular and as it related to the MSCs that you were at task saturation, and if so, how was that handled? Did it ever come up in conversation like, "Well, we are at the absolute limit of our

ability to handle this."

BGen Savage: I think we talked about how busy we were.

Particularly, when I got -- well, for me, I think the busiest times, to be honest with you, beforehand, when I was gone, those guys were working seven days a week to manage this COVID thing. So that was something I was -- you know, I was busy with Native Fury, but when I got back, they were telling me about how crazy it was when I first started. It stated to get a little bit more tempo -- well, it was still busy, but it got a little bit more tempo around the time I came back home.

But I don't think -- I think if they hit task saturation, sir, it was probably about the time I was deploying. And it was busy before I left, but I, you know, I wasn't feeling like I was in combat or anything, like you are staying up to midnight every night. Nothing like that.

LtGen Mundy: So when, you know -- we're bouncing around here, but that's, okay. Because you have said some key things here. I just want to make sure I understand it.

So when you and Colonel Bronzi talked about COVID as one of the issues that you talked to him about when you got back, what I'm finding is that there's a different perspective, right, at some levels and some organizations, like you said, it was just

something to fight through, something to work through. But at other levels, it was the thing that you had to deal with. And so, did you have any indication that this was had an impact on the 15th MEU, or in particular, the MEF or the division's or the wing's ability to supervise the forming and composite of the 15th MEU?

BGen Savage: I can't one hundred percent say. I know that the staffs were very busy working on that one specific problem while trying to manage everything else we're doing. I can tell you that because Colonel Bronzi was dealing with the Navy, and they're -- it was more difficult. They were, in my opinion -- because everything I say is going to go on record, I guess. But I think the Teddy Roosevelt really scared them, and they were like hypersensitive to COVID stuff, which ramped up the COVID pressure on the staff for the 15th MEU, which is something he had to work through.

So when you say -- it's like even talking about RUT, they miss any sets and reps? No. But had we not had jerked that around at the last minute, would the preparation for RUT had more attention put on it? Probably. Because staffs weren't trying to reset the whole thing. And I think there is some of that involved with trying to figure out how we're going to manage

COVID before they got underway.

LtGen Mundy: And again, to come back to Native Fury. Are you aware that the AAV platoon that later went to 15th MEU was the one that --

BGen Savage: I've got to be honest, I was not.

LtGen Mundy: I just thought I would ask.

BGen Savage: I mean, I learned afterwards, but I don't think I was really aware of it until sometime in the spring after we were back, that those guys had been in Native Fury with me.

LtGen Mundy: Okay. So shifting gears a little bit here.

So given the operational commitments leading up to 15th MEU

composite, did the MEF MSCs in your view, from your kind of your

perch, and I know you were gone for a period of time during the

forming, did they adhere to the prescribed forming, and compositing

timelines as prescribed by the Marine Corps and I MEF orders and

directives? Again, if you don't know, because you were gone -- you

were gone for a significant period of time.

BGen Savage: I can only tell you what we talked about. So what we had talked about was specifically on the ACE, So the ACE WTI quarrels, and we always have a debate with the ACE about what times, they're going to, chop to the MEU. We chopped them a little bit late, we had the commanders and key staff participate in --

I can't remember if it was R2P2 training or -- but there was a training event that they had to do. I'm just blanking out right now. That they wanted them to participate on. Yeah.

It was the R2P2 training for the MEU. So they were doing the planning down in Coronado. So the compromise was we're going to get the key players in there for the R2P2 training. While the rest of the squadron does quals, and DETs do their quals. And I think they chopped it in early May.

They chopped and then, I can't tell you I was completely aware of the time, but then looking over the things, we allowed the battery to chop late too, and the battery was out at Native Fury with me.

LtGen Mundy: Okay. So do you believe that the -- I mean, so you said to the ACE, and then you mentioned, specifically, the Battery, but, you know, was there any discussion on it with Colonel Bronzi? -- any discussion about the division, units from the division, BLT 1/4?

BGen Savage: About them chopping late?

LtGen Mundy: Yes. Or meeting the prescribed timelines?

The JLTIs, you know, getting the vehicles from the AAV platoon?

BGen Savage: That was not a discussion I had with Colonel

Bronzi.

LtGen Mundy: You know, from your perspective, again, at the MEF level, you believe the MSCs had adequate touch points with the MEF to communicate training and material readiness, and you talked about the G-3's own eyes, or during CUBs that you were doing every week and that kind of ramped up after COVID. But just generally from your perspective, were there adequate opportunities for them to express to the higher level, "Hey, here's where we are, here's where we need to tighten things up?"

BGen Savage: Yes. I mean, it would depend on what they wanted to talk about, but every two weeks, General Osterman would have all of this MSC commanders and MSE commanders in a video conference. We still do it. It is every other Monday we do it. We have every week we do the Ops intel. Ops intel has as an aviation and ground -- I mean, aviation readiness portion of it. But it's also got all the MSEs talk during that thing.

We've got the monthly DRRS brief, which is another thing I was deeply involved. So we do that every month and there's prep that goes into that, as you can imagine, to include the ERWG, which I do for the ACMC right before the boss does the QRB to the Commandant. And then we have the MEF quarterly summit. That only goes once a quarter, but that's all about

readiness and where we are with things.

So it seems to me that they had pretty adequate touch points to talk about challenges as far as readiness goes

LtGen Mundy: Did anything surface in any of those events that kind of caught your attention?

BGen Savage: No. And that's where my memory is going back to, because, especially we got back from Native Fury, it was about how is this affecting you? You know, your training, your readiness for GFM, everything else. It was a pain in the ass, but everybody was managing it and it was minimal impact.

LtGen Mundy: Okay. So, again, kind of shifting gears, but still at the MEF level here, what guidance did MEF headquarters provide on how to balance OPLAN and GFM readiness. So you've got potentially 14-22. You've also got requirements to source, you know, just these routine recurring deployments?

BGen Savage: Yes. That question was tough one for me, sir, because, a, I don't remember any guidance, and, b, they seemed to overlap. The only thing I can tell you is that when he redid, General Osterman redid the campaign plan based on what's going on in the world, he switched the priority from our first thing LOO One is about GFM readiness, and, you know, LOO2 is about war fighting and he flipped those around. That's the only

thing I can think of.

There is nothing, that I recall -- there was no specific, "Hey, you know, pay attention to OPLAN first, and then pay attention to GFM." It's like they're both no foil missions. And one, they kind of feed each other. I mean, if you got guys ready to go to GFM and the balloon goes up, well, they're ready to go support the OPLAN and vice versa. So I don't recall any conversations about that.

LtGen Mundy: The point, I think you kind of touched on it was, a plan is just a plan, but it may happen, but GFM will happen. And so, I'm trying to find out how the commander established priorities, and I think you've indicated that, you know -- he clearly said war fighting, and then --

BGen Savage: GFM.

LtGen Mundy: Or GFM readiness. Do you remember what was below that? (Testing your memory).

BGen Savage: Let's see. There was -- I just can't remember. I know what the topics were. I mean, it was like managing resources, it was resiliency of the force, and I think there was one other. If I get tested on my knowledge of the I MEF campaign plan, that's going to hurt.

LtGen Mundy: That's pretty good. It's over a year ago.

You are good to remember that. So just kind of sticking within that same theme then, the MSC commander's or staff, and you mentioned DRRS, but were commanders and staff articulating risks during these regular touch points? As they came up or however, it might have been discussed and adjustments made accordingly?

BGen Savage: That's my memory of it for a lot briefs, but yeah, that's my memory of it. And that was kind of General Osterman's way of approaching things, you know? Give them where are we? Where are we supposed to be? How can we help? What are your issues to get you there? And that's how we'd talk about risk. And I mean, I can't remember specifics right now, but that was my memory is that's the way General Osterman did things.

He'd get the commanders on the video, and we'd be talking about whatever the topic was, and if there were issues about where they needed to be, he wanted to know how can the MEF get in there and help. What do you need from us? So he could understand what the MSC commanders were going through.

LtGen Mundy: And so, the relationship between the MEF and the MSCs, how would you describe that?

BGen Savage: Sir, I thought it was great. And I've served in this MEF before, and, I mean, you know General Osterman, what

a gentleman. The staff at I MEF and the staff of the MSCs were just incredible. And there's a lot of inbreeding between those staffs because they move around back and forth. But I thought it was about as good as it could be, certainly at the commander level, and it seemed to me also from the many briefs they said on at the AC/S level, too. We just got -- we get along with those guys.

I mean, I don't know if you remember (7)(c) when he was out there, but (b)(3),(b)(6), he was a G-3 for the ACE that came out to Native Fury with me. And, you know, first, it was (b)(3),(b)(6),(b)(7)(c) down at the Division. I mean, these guys are just the salt of the earth. So I think it was a great relationship. I don't know what everyone else is going to tell you, but from my vantage point, it was a great relationship.

LtGen Mundy: Actually, that's a common theme, is that the relationship is very good. So you're not telling me anything that's different.

So now, let's move into a little bit more specificity here. So there was a break between the 11th and the 15th MEU, I think, over a year since the MEF had sourced a MEU. And, of course, that means that the MSCs weren't provided their ACE and LCE. And in particular here, the 1st Marine Division had not provided a BLT for a West Coast originated MEU for approximately a year. Did you sense

any lack of institutional muscle memory or cause for concern?

BGen Savage: I didn't, sir. But as we talked about, this is my first watching this thing to come together, at least from my level. But the other guy that I talked to and I leaned on a lot as I'm learning this MEU stuff was and he didn't voice any concerns about anything like that. And we talked a lot. So (b)(3), (b)(6), (c)(7)(c) (c) was our G-7 EOTG guy and a former MEU commander, and there didn't seem to be to me. I mean, again, that was the first time at this level anyway, I've seen this thing come together.

LtGen Mundy: So regarding the MEF's policy on Marine Corps

Combat Readiness Evaluation, you know, there was a host of

challenges including COVID. Were you aware of any unusual

difficulties these units might have encountered in units sourced to

the MEU and in completing the MCCRE or any other mandated training

requirements, such as under water egress training and swim

qualifications?

BGen Savage: I know that -- never heard anything about any problems with getting the MCCRE done, nor swim qual. It was never discussion. It's I think it's always a challenge down to

down to unit levels to get those things done. We did have some conversations about the UET because it went down for a while and there was a short period time where there was a COVID issue at the pool, but not a hell of a lot. And going back to those old SITREPs, I tell you with Bronzi, we talked about UET twice, and both times, it was like we're moving, we're on track. We're getting -- I shouldn't even said that. Think the words he said "we're making progress on UET and we're moving along." And he may have been just talking about the command element. I'm not sure.

But the only discussion -- water qualification? No talk about nobody getting that done. And MCCRE, no talk about not being able to get that done.

LtGen Mundy: So I brought these two briefs over. I showed them to you just before we came in. In both of them, they talk about -- some of the units talk about whether they had conducted a MCCRE or not. The AAV platoon, for example, there's no mention of a MCCRE; although, it says something to the effect of "trained but not evaluated." Did you preside over any of these briefs and anything did you see anything that caught your eye?

BGen Savage: To the second question, no. To the first question, the first brief, the 240, 270 brief, I was in the

middle of Native Fury for that one, so I didn't take it.

The second one was my first, it may have been my first work day, certainly my first Monday off of ROM, and I pulled those to see and it looks familiar. I can't remember the day of the brief, exactly what was said. But I can just tell you this, if there would have been something that would've popped out that was like, Okay, this is a red flag. I would have remembered it. And then, if I could remember specifically -- and I don't even know if we went through all those slides when I looked at it. I think we might have gone through the slides until it said commanding general's comments, and we didn't go through the rest of the slides.

LtGen Mundy: So back to the original question, you know,
MCCRE's have been a long standing part of every unit's life cycle,
and the MEF has a pretty clear order out on this, that every unit,
to include its attachments, separate battalions, will conduct a
MCCRE.

BGen Savage: Yes, sir.

LtGen Mundy: Was your understanding that that was a must do, and was it routinely something that came up in briefs, or something that you or General Osterman asked questions about, or were briefed on that?

BGen Savage: I think we talked about it -- I don't know whether it was the staff or General Osterman was in there, like as we were talking about the composite. I didn't have a ton of discussions about this particular topic, and this is because I remember doing -- getting ready for the 31st MEU with you. And I mean, I thought it was a known must that you've got to do MCCRE. You got to be core MET qualified before you can chop to the MEU to start working on your assigned METs. And that goes for other things we do too.

And so, when -- no, it didn't. When I talked to Bronzi after coming off that thing, you know, there was no concerns about the readiness of the units that joined him. So it didn't cross my mind to say, "Hey, did they do the training they needed to do to get in?"

LtGen Mundy: And I know he was receiving feedback at times on the EOTG course that the company had gone through and that everybody was saying, Hey, you know, the mech company, for example, did a great job.

BGen Savage: And that's another thing, I mean, again, (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)

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

great officer, and he knows that stuff backwards and

forwards. He was telling me like it was. And he would tell me if

somebody -- the only thing I remember from the units that

weren't up to where he wanted to do it were, I think, the primary trap platoon was the one that  ${}^{(b)(3),\,(b)(6),}_{(b)(7)(c)}$  talked to me about.

LtGen Mundy: The primary what?

BGen Savage: Primary trap platoon. The secondary one was getting good reps. He didn't like the way that the primary one executed their reps of the trap is my memory of it. And he was pretty vocal by how well the MEF command -- or the MEU command element was working. So he thought that was a top crack outfit, that MEU command element. But I do remember him specifically talking about the raid courses and those guys were getting it done and looking pretty good.

LtGen Mundy: It's probably a question that, you know, wouldn't have surfaced to your level. But I'm going to ask it anyway. Were you aware that the AAV platoon sourced to BLT 1/4 had not completed a MCCRE?

BGen Savage: I was not.

LtGen Mundy: Then we already talked about UET training, and you're aware the MEF policy letter that lays this out, makes it clear in terms what the expectations are?

BGen Savage: Yes, sir. I mean, I couldn't --

LtGen Mundy: Swim qualifications and UET, in particular.

BGen Savage: And I got smarter on it after we started

looking at the investigation, but I knew, you know that all the high risk personnel have to go to the UET or helo dunker, which I know it's the same thing, but I kept calling it the helo dunker because I remembered it as. But I got the difference. I know what it is. But it's mandated that all high risk training guys go through that.

LtGen Mundy: Is it clear -- is it a clear order?

BGen Savage: Post-facto, reading through this thing,
looking at it during the investigation that, I think, it's vague
enough that you have to read it pretty clear to understand what's
acceptable and what's not. Between the MAET, the SVET, and the UET

LtGen Mundy: SWET.

BGen Savage: The SWET. That's what it is. You know what can substitute for what? And it was after the fact, reading that thing, and realizing what Bravo Company 1/4, kind of, I wouldn't say played that system, but got what they could. They were challenged to get down to the UET, and they were trying to make it happen and get it done. But I think they honestly thought by the order they were getting after it. If you really look at the order, and I think it was one of the recommendations of the investigation that we rework that piece. So it's more clear. If

it wasn't, it should be, because it's it took a few reads to really understand that thing.

LtGen Mundy: So I want to shift now to the PMINT in particular. And you were here then, after you came back from Native Fury?

BGen Savage: Yes, sir.

LtGen Mundy: Based on your experience, was the 15th MEU schedule, PMINT schedule of events, and the tempo, was this in line with what you thought a MEU should be doing at this point in their progressive PTP training?

BGen Savage: It was and I took briefs from the MEU command element and from EOTG prior to them doing PMINT. I mean, it was somewhat aggressive, but I my guidance was pretty clear, both to and Chris Bronzi, that you guys on the rheostat on this. If you feel like you go on too fast, dial it back. If you feel like you're going to slow, dial it up. And understand, the first thing that needs to happen is you guys need to do this safely. And they got it. And that was a recurring theme that I've gone throughout this thing with, because I know PMINT was their first underway period. But it really, to be honest with you, the same thing with ARG/MEU and COMPTUEX, push it, but don't

sacrifice safety to get this stuff done. Wouldn't get a rep somewhere else later.

LtGen Mundy: You mentioned (b)(3),(b)(6),(b)(7)(c) , and I know he was the G-7 EOTG, did you have any discussions with him about the schedule events, about the exercise, before they went out and did it? Or was this pretty much it was just he was hands off and this was the 15th MEU and the PHIBRON?

BGen Savage: For PMINT? No, he was still watching that part of it. He was still watching that part of it. And I might be getting my ARG/MEU and COMPTUEX mixed up, but he was still watching. And as I recall, he was still like there to assist.

Not there on ship, but there to help to make sure that they got all the reps they needed.

And I just can't remember specifically, it might have been a VBSS thing or something they wanted him to to work through again. But I'd have to go back and look at the briefs to remember exactly what I got briefed. But I was comfortable at the time with the pace and the schedule as long as the commander knew that he could dial it back with no harm, no foul.

LtGen Mundy: And I know the PMINT shifted. It was actually shifted later, so they bought an extra month. But was that a cause for concern at all?

BGen Savage: Well, I think the opposite. I think -- I shouldn't say the opposite, because the COVID thing was hassle, and we were worried about the OENS for the ship. You know, you've only got one shot now. PMINT is your only shot to get this thing loaded, the ARG loaded right. Because you're going to reload it and you got what you got because we're getting underway and we're standing away. That part was concern.

The part that wasn't a concern was he was able -- he used that time valuably. So Bronzi got those guys out and got extra reps in before they went out to PMINT. So we got some post-RUT remediation before they went to PMINT.

LtGen Mundy: You know, one of the things -- you're aware of it now because you've read the investigation many times -- but we're trying to figure out the lack of waterborne training for the AAV -- for the mech company really. And this being the first time that the mech company was going to conduct a full mission profile waterborne surface raid onto San Clemente Island.

Did that ever come up in discussion as a, hey, this might be, as you said, maybe one of those things there, you, are going a little bit too fast? -- have they done any splash and recovery ops? Have they, you know, could have gone over here to the basin and anything like that? Had that not surfaced in any conversation?

BGen Savage: It did not.

LtGen Mundy: So the pace of the exercise was you thought appropriate to the MEU's ability at this point?

BGen Savage: I did.

LtGen Mundy: I am bouncing around here and I apologize for it. But I am going to go back to these briefs, Tom. Just, you know, the E-270, E-240 brief, you said you weren't there.

BGen Savage: No, sir.

LtGen Mundy: You were gone. But you were here for the precomposite brief? I think the E-211 forming and PTP brief.

BGen Savage: I took it from my house. General Osterman took that brief. I dialed in from the house.

LtGen Mundy: Okay. You were just sitting in?

BGen Savage: Yes, sir.

LtGen Mundy: Did anything surface in there in terms of, you know, major issues or was there anything?

BGen Savage: I can't remember the brief very well at all. I just know that if something would have flagged, I would have remembered it. And nothing flagged on that brief that I recall.

LtGen Mundy: Okay. One of the concerns that we've heard that's been identified throughout the investigation is the force generation model and, you know, how the Marine Corps -- not so

much a dig at the Marine Corps. We've all grown accustomed to this. But has that ever come up in conversation at the MEF about, you know, the force management summit, then the force synch conferences and picking units? Is there anything that you think might improve the way that we do this?

BGen Savage: Well, sir, I mean, sir, that's like a running commentary we've had since I've been a lieutenant. And I mean, you get your people late right before you deploy. You're trying to get them off to school. We should be doing workups.

For this particular unit, the only thing I can remember is I think 1/4 had some platoon sergeant, squad leaders that didn't have school yet. And the one thing that Chris Bronzi and I absolutely talked about, because he was pissed about it, was 1/4 had briefed that they had 104 percent or something, they had all their people. And then, at some point -- and I'm not sure exactly when it was in my memory banks here, but --

LtGen Mundy: He was wrong. He was missing five lieutenants.

Sometimes your leadership comes in late.

BGen Savage: Five lieutenant, yes, sir. So that's the one thing I remember talking to him about.

LtGen Mundy: Back when you and I were in 1/9, there was a

sort of a regimental specialization, you could call it, where one regiment sourced battalions to the 31st MEU, 5th Marines; one sourced the West Coast MEUs, and 7th Marines, for example, the UDP. It may be too hard given all of the competing requirements,

But in your opinion, as it relates to the force generation models, is that something that maybe we ought to look at in terms of building institutional memory in the units? You know, 1st Marines, for example, got very good at doing MEU BLTs

BGen Savage: The Oldest. Well, so that's how I grew up and it worked.

Because I was a boat company guy, and then a helo company guy when I was 3/5 later on, and the fact that you had that institutional knowledge coming in. I mean, by the time I got done with my first deployment as a boat company guy, I was the XO of that company. I knew about all there was to know about boat ops and getting on and off an amphib and all that stuff.

And I was able to be the expert when the new company commander came in and the new lieutenants come in. I was a guy

that kind of knew how to do it. Same thing happened to me when I came in as a helo born company commander. I had been helo born company commander, but I had institutional knowledge within the company because we'd been doing it for a long time.

So I think that's a good model. You lose staff. I've heard debates over the years. It's, you know, these guys are the haves and have nots. If your 7th Marines, you're just doing UDP, that type of thing.

In my opinion, because we rotate people throughout divisions anyway, you can get a UDP deployment, a MEU deployment. So that that's a non-starter. I think you need that institutional memory; specifically, for those high risk missions that we do on the MEU.

LtGen Mundy: So, Tom, I want to ask you about the incident involving the 26th MEU almost a year to the day, just about three weeks, more than a year prior, in which AAV returning to a ship during an exercise sank off the coast of North Carolina. Were you aware of that mishap, and was it ever discussed in the context of forming and training MEU's and I MEF, you know, from the perspective of lessons learned passed on? Here, I'm thinking specifically of the Jason Rother incident, which I'm sure you remember.

And informally, for years, battalions were required to read that -- You may remember we read it before we went to

Twentynine Palms. Then-Colonel Dunford required everybody to read the Jason Rother investigation.

So can you tell me anything about that?

BGen Savage: No, sir. It happened during my transition, from PP&O out here. So it's about a month after happened. I was back up on the net. It was never talked about. And to be honest with you, until I saw that question, I was not even aware of it, even after all this investigation. I don't remember that one.

LtGen Mundy: And then, finally, what concerns do you have outside the scope of this investigation? Anything that you think the Marine Corps needs to address or could address in a different forum that might prevent this type of mishap?

BGen Savage: So I guess it's not on this investigation, but it's tied to the other investigation. I think that, in my opinion, 3rd Tracks had a cultural problem. There were too many things going wrong down there, based on what I read after the investigation.

And I think one of the reasons, having been an assistant division commander, I think one of the reasons that culture was bad because nobody was getting down into that

battalion. There was nobody -- between General Castellvi and that battalion commander, there was nobody down there giving extra love to let Lieutenant Colonel commander and making sure that he wasn't going off the rails.

The institution has decided not to provide a one-star general to that billet. They have decided not to provide a colonel to that billet unless you overstaff it and take a hit somewhere else. Which we ended up doing, not related to this accident. We had a plan to put (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) down there. We did this last summer.

I think that could help prevent this type of thing with the separate battalions. The span of control for that Division commander is huge. And I know that as a Lieutenant Colonel commander, having a regimental commander over the top makes a difference. Part of the reason we hesitate to deploy regiments heel to toe and why we kind of -- and we saw this during OIF and OEF -- that you get -- maybe a little bit different during OIF and OEF because we had this rigid PTP had to go through as a battalion commander.

But if you don't have oversight, your staffs aren't going to be as well trained as the battalion commander, depending on who the guy is, can either think he's a superhero or be scared

to do anything. You need a little bit out over the top. And we, as an institution, have decided we got better places to put these people than put them down there in that position.

So I think that's one thing that, as an institution, we can fix. And then, institutionally, of course, the basic mechanical problem that we've now resolved, at least for now, with the AAVs, I mean, that can has been kicked down the road for years and years and years.

LtGen Mundy: So, yeah, let me just follow up on something you said that sparked my attention. The cultural problem in the 3rd AAV Battalion, the leadership problem, the leadership challenge is acute.

So they had not performed well. I think they failed -- I don't know if failed is not the right word. But they had some findings on a FSMAO, and then on a subsequent logistics readiness evaluation. The FSMAO findings would have gone higher than division. I'm not asking to say, hey, were you reading every FSMAO report, but do you recall anything, whether it was logistics related, or anything else regarding the only AAV battalion in the I Marine Expeditionary Force; did that ever come up?

BGen Savage: No. And it didn't -- I was surprised to see

that. Because, again, I say I look at DRRS. And 3rd Tracks was never read. They were never -- they were usually R-1, R-2, or 2,5-1 or 2. So when you told me that I was -- when you asked me that question, I was surprised. Because that was not something that was briefed to me. And that's not something that has been briefed to me since I've been here. That's something I've talked about for months, but I do look at DRRS. So that's where I assess the readiness. And that never came up as an issue.

LtGen Mundy: And along the same lines, because I think you had returned from Native Fury at this time. You might have been in ROM, or you were just about to get out of ROM. And the AAVs that were provided to BLT 1/4, they were not ready at the chop date, and there were some maintenance challenges there. Did that ever come up in either your meetings with Chris Bronzi or in any sort of brief?

BGen Savage: Never. And again, it came out in the investigation, and they were handling it down at the 0-6 level that they, apparently, thought they had a handle on it. It never bubbled up in a conversation I had with Chris. It never bubbled up on a SITREP.

LtGen Mundy: The G-4 wasn't tracking it, for example?

BGen Savage: I know now the G-4 was absolutely tracking it.

They just didn't bring it up to me. So  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}$  was the G-4 at the time. He was tracking it.  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}$  was the G-3 at the time. He was tracking it. Bronzi was in constant contact with them. I know  $^{(b)(3), (b)}_{(6), (b)(7)(c)}$  - they were in contact with  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}$  , and I don't remember who the 4 was at Division.

And they kind of all collaborated to go down and fix the thing, and it just never rose to my level.

LtGen Mundy: Okay. This is Lieutenant General Mundy concluding the interview with Brigadier General Savage. [The investigative interview concluded on 21 April 2021.]

I, Lieutenant General C. E. Mundy III, attest that the preceding transcript is a true and accurate verbatim account of the interview of Brigadier General T. Savage held on 21 April 2021.

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

C. E. MUNDY III LtGen, USMC was a boiler problem in the late winter, early spring of 2020 that caused the UET to be down for maintenance. And the management of that and who gets in when, from a prioritization perspective, sometimes requires MEF involvement, but typically is done within the Division, because it's all division units that are getting through the underwater egress trainer. And here's a discussion that I had repeatedly as a regimental commander, which is, where's the priority for that kind of stuff go.

The most dangerous -- the most dangerous situation typically assessed is a helicopter or a tilt rotor, an MV-22 go and down at sea, and the helo companies typically get the priority, then it's 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, small boat companies, and in the case of 15th Marine Expeditionary unit, the boat company that we're forming as well.

So previous risk assessments that I'd been involved in as a regimental commander looked at it in those regards. When prioritizing risk for underwater egress training and where that lies, melbourne small boat, and then mech company --

IO (Col $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}$ :  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)}$ , last question I have about this, so Division sets the priority for use at the UET trainer --

WIT: -- and MEF gets involved if there's a conflict.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3),\,(b)(6),\,(b)(7)}_{(c)}$ : That's exactly what I was going to ask

you. You're the arbiter. If there is conflict, then MEF lays it out.

Did you know of any conflicts? Did you have to get involved with specific reference to the forming of the 15th MEU?

WIT: I knew that we were closely monitoring the boiler repair to to get it back up. And I talked to the chief of staff and, at the time, G-3 of MCI West, who was, Yep, we are on it. And (b)(3),(b)(6),(b)(7)(c) , like we are paying attention to this. We know how important it is to the MEF. And as, you know, it takes time to fix infrastructure. But they got their people on it and they got it fixed.

I couldn't tell you off top of my head how many days you UET was down due to COVID-19 stuff as well. But there was at least one time where somebody tested positive, and, therefore, we had to isolate the contractors who worked at the UET in order to run them through the testing regime, and then we were able to resume training within a few days after that as well. But there were availability impacts to the UET during this timeframe, which is not unusual.

IO (Col  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}_{(c)}$ ): Okay. So that leads right into my final question. And that's the debriefs and the work up to PMINT.

When the concept of operations was briefed, do you

recall any concerns about the mech raid in waterborne operations with BLT 1/4; namely, being the first -- that would be the first time that they are in the tracks conducting waterborne operations?

WIT: I don't remember that coming up.

IO  $(\text{Col}_{(c)}^{(b)(3),(b)(6),(b)(7)})$ : Thank you. I don't have any more questions to you. There's one last paragraph of administration that will read here.

First, is there anything else you'd like to add? WIT: There is not.

IO (Col (c) : You're directed not to discuss this interview or anything that was discussed during the interview with anyone other than members of the investigation team. If you're asked about the investigation, do not answer any questions and immediately notify us, Colonel (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c) , or your commanding officer.

[The investigative interview recessed at 0818, 15 April 2021.]

I, Colonel  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)}_{(c)}$ , attest that the preceding transcript is a true and accurate verbatim account of the interview of Colonel  $^{(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(c)}_{(c)}$  held on 15 April 2021.

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

Col, USMC