

and a single squadron.

The obvious solution would be appropriate augmentation from the higher Marine unit from which the MEU was formed, in this case from the 2d Marine Division or II Marine Expeditionary Force. Such assets may have been available as DESERT STORM ended and PROVIDE COMFORT began. But what if DESERT STORM had lasted longer? The precedent established during PROVIDE COMFORT warrants additional study.

The expansion of the MEU with additional, cohesive, battalion teams established it as both a joint and combined brigade task force; however, the MEU staff was never sufficiently augmented, beyond liaison officers, to be considered a joint or combined staff. Certainly a larger Marine staff, approaching the size of a MEB staff, could have properly controlled a joint or combined task force without becoming a fully balanced joint or com-

bined staff. The advantages of a staff from a single Service include cohesion and a single doctrine. Liaison officers could assist with the difference of non-Marine maneuver or support units. On the other hand, if Marine resources to expand the MEU staff into a normal MEB staff are unavailable, then the MEU staff could be augmented with additional officers from non-Marine sources to make it a joint or combined staff. Both concepts for a mixed maneuver force have advantages and disadvantages. Both deserve further study.

The MAGTF has a crucial role to play within America's developing unified command structure, particularly as the American force structure is reduced. It provides each CinC an exceptionally valuable command and control headquarters. The use of an expanded MAGTF as a joint or combined task force is no longer novel. It

is one of the fastest deployable bases upon which to build a deploying, multidimensional force capable of going into combat or participating in a humanitarian crisis. But it requires more consideration than merely assuming command of attached units from other Services, American or allied. Operation PROVIDE COMFORT confirmed previous precedents and set some new ones. For this and its remarkable success, it remains worthy of our attention. But with the alteration of just one or two variables, the tempo could have been much higher and the stress much greater. A study of PROVIDE COMFORT should include altering these variables and addressing the consequences.



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## Marine Corps Humanitarian and Disaster Relief Operations

by Capt Gerald F. Nalepa, USMCR

*After-action reports available through the Marine Corps Lessons Learned System provide a wealth of insight into the humanitarian and disaster relief operations that seem to be acquiring greater importance in the post-Cold War era.*

With the end of the Cold War the Marine Corps, always a flexible force, will have to increase its ability to respond to a widening array of mission assignments despite shrinking resources. This increased flexibility has already been demonstrated in recent humanitarian and disaster relief operations (including restoration of civil order) in northern Iraq, Los Angeles, south Florida, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and most recently Somalia. Although each operation has had unique requirements, a review of situation and after-action reports reflects common problems that faced each commander. Because the Marine Corps can expect an increase in these types of mission assignments, it is important that commanders begin to exercise their staffs in the unique aspects of humanitarian

and disaster relief operations.

This article will focus on similarities among recent missions, how commanders on the scene handled problems encountered, and how future commanders may address these issues prior to entering a humanitarian or disaster relief operation. Data for this article was gathered from unit after-action reports submitted under the Marine Corps Lessons Learned System (MCLLS). A more in-depth examination of the issues specific to each operation can be found in the reports submitted to MCLLS.

### Common Threads

In each of the operations reviewed, reoccurring themes emerged. After-action reports stress many items that units "wished they had thought of

earlier." Commanders can expect communications and logistics to be especially hard pressed. Creative use of assets on hand can help a unit overcome initial shortfalls in service to civilians.

*Duration of Operations.* In each operation reviewed, units underestimated the time they would be deployed in the area of operations. This led to Marines not properly packing sufficient hygiene and personal care items for the mission. It also led to an underestimate of logistic requirements and equipment repair items needed to conduct sustained field operations. A commander can expect relief operations to last weeks and months, not days. Because of the urgent nature of these mission assignments, an overestimate in the planning stage is recommended. In a combat environment,

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commanders can take a defensive posture until reinforcements arrive. This is not possible in relief operations, especially with ever-increasing media attention and a public expectation of immediate action and results.

**Liaison.** As soon as a commander receives orders to conduct humanitarian or disaster relief operation, he needs to establish liaison with every Government and nongovernmental agency that has a similar responsibility. Communications must begin before the unit reaches the area of operations. Points of contact should be firmly established both with the agency's representative at the scene and at the agency's headquarters. Odds are that there will be numerous agencies on the scene. It is important to track them all down and send a representative to work directly with each one present. After-action reports from previous operations stressed delays and missed coordination due to liaison being established after units reached the area of operations. Commanders should invite each agency to send a representative to his staff meetings. Close coordination can reduce redundant work, avoid waste, and speed the effort.

**Open Purchase.** Marines prepare logistically for combat, not for humanitarian and disaster relief operations. Because the logistic requirements can be radically different, the commander on the scene must be given the authority to contract the purchase of civilian goods and services upon arrival. Every relief operation has some unique requirements. The commander on the scene must have the ability to act quickly, once the situation is assessed. This can only be accomplished if the commander has the authority to spend money. Businessmen, both inside and outside the United States, are often not willing to take IOUs from the Government. After-action reports from each operation studied cite delays in delivering transportation, supplies, shelter, and medical care due to the commander's inability to contract quickly with civilian suppliers for items and services that were not part of the unit's assets or supply block, but were required for mission success. In joint operations with the U.S. Army, Army commanders had a contract officer attached to their unit, often times possessing a safe full of cash. This provided the Army commander greater support flexibility.

**Civil Affairs.** All the Marine Corps civil affairs assets are currently within the Reserve force structure. An anticipated increase in the number of operations involving civilian assistance, suggests that an active duty civil affairs group (CAG) should be considered. In the meantime, commanders should request civil affairs augmentation as soon as it becomes likely that their unit will be involved in operations of this kind. At a minimum, Reserve CAG units must be kept apprised of developments via message traffic, so they can be up to speed if suddenly deployed to the area of operations. Each of the after-action reports reviewed expressed regret that civil affairs assets were not on location sooner.

**Public Affairs.** As with CAG units, commanders who have not been assigned public affairs assets should request public affairs augmentation as soon as it is likely that they will be providing humanitarian or disaster relief services. Units formed specifically for deployment to a relief area should focus early on public affairs assistance. Previous operations did not place an immediate priority on this augmentation and later regretted it.

**Legal Affairs.** In previous operations, especially those within the United States, unit commanders initially underestimated the need for lawyers. Staff judge advocate (SJA) augmentation is critical to relief operations. The commander on the scene has a responsibility to protect the Marine Corps and the U.S. Government from potential law suits. This can only be accomplished through sufficient SJA augmentation. Operations within the United States will demand extensive legal support because all actions taken by Marines during civilian relief operations will have potential legal consequences. SJA personnel working in the Hurricane Andrew relief operation developed numerous liability release forms and written agreements with local governments in an attempt to protect the Marine Corps from potential liability.

### Key Variables for Consideration

The single most important variable setting the tone for previous operations was whether the mission area was within the United States or on foreign soil. Operations in the United States take on a different set of legal

and procedural priorities. Operations on foreign soil have similar characteristics, but the commander is faced with a different set of priorities. Each "problem area" or "challenge" presented here was cited in at least one of the after-action reports reviewed and seems likely to reoccur in future humanitarian and disaster relief operations.

**Potential for Violence.** It is important for the commander to make an initial assessment of the "violence potential" within the area of operations. Commanders should be prepared to keep the peace. In a high threat environment, such as the Los Angeles riots, the commander's first mission is to work with law enforcement officials, restore order, and then turn to the clean up and assistance task at hand. However, if the violence potential is low, the major threat may become lost or stolen weapons (which did occur with Army units in south Florida).

If the threat of violence is low, commanders are best advised to keep only a minimum number of Marines armed for security purposes, the remainder of the unit's weapons should be secured, but readily available if needed. It is too easy for Marines working on clean up and direct assistance work to lose track of their weapons or be purposely distracted and have a weapon stolen. Those carrying weapons should also be carrying ammunition. A Marine carrying an M16 without ammunition is the target for a mugging, even in an area of low violence potential.

**Relief Camp Arrangements:** In operations where relief camps were established for displaced persons, after-action reports advised that relief camps be divided into three subdivisions—single male, single female, and families. This can help relieve the potential of sexual assault crimes. Criminal investigation capability should be requested in any situation where large relief camps are established and odds are likely that some form of criminal element will enter.

Families consume the majority of services that will be provided (medical, child care, etc.), therefore, camp design should center around the family subdivision, which should also be the largest. After-action reports also expressed the need for units involved in camp management to possess the capability to issue identification cards. (Polaroid camera, sufficient film, and

lamination). The issuance of identification cards (or the Army's enemy prisoner of war identification wristbands) facilitates administration and security. The wristbands were used in Haiti, reportedly with great success.

**Women Marines.** If a large number of female refugees can be expected, women Marines can be of great assistance. In Guantanamo, for example, they assisted Haitian women in the use of many health and comfort items that they had never seen before because of their impoverished condition.

**Communications.** This area is always a challenge. It will be the job of the communications officer to use his imagination, maximize his assets, and explore all viable communication alternatives. In each operation reviewed, communications assets were stretched to their limit due to unit dispersion and communications support requested by civilian agencies. During the Los Angeles operation, cellular phones were often the most effective means of communication. The inability of commanders to contract for these services upon arrival was cited in several after-action reports as a problem that could have been anticipated and provided for.

In all the operations reviewed, the ability of the commander to monitor CNN cable news service, either through

local services or satellite, provided up to the minute news on the overall situation and much needed intelligence. It also provided him an assessment of how the world was viewing relief progress. Because perception has become reality through "on the spot" media coverage, CNN can provide the commander an "objective critique" he may not be receiving from his subordinates.

After-action reports also discussed increased personal computer and fax machine requirements. Media on the scene provided the public with instant news reports. Unit commanders and supporting units felt similar pressure to provide higher headquarters with up-to-the-minute situation reports. There was a consensus that this could best be achieved through normal phone lines using fax machines and personal computers tied into local area networks (LANs) and wide area networks (WANs). Giving contracting authority to the mission commander would provide the capability to lease supplemental communications and computer equipment for the duration of the operation.

**Transportation.** These assets will also be heavily taxed. The commander will find himself with more attachments than in a tactical scenario (CAGs, public affairs officers, chaplains, etc.). Generally they will not bring their own vehicle assets but will readily ex-

plain their need for a dedicated vehicle. Displaced civilians will require transportation, and agencies providing relief assistance will also turn to the Marines for vehicle support. In Los Angeles and south Florida commanders contracted with civilian carriers to supplement their needs. This is another example of why the commander requires on-the-scene contracting authority.

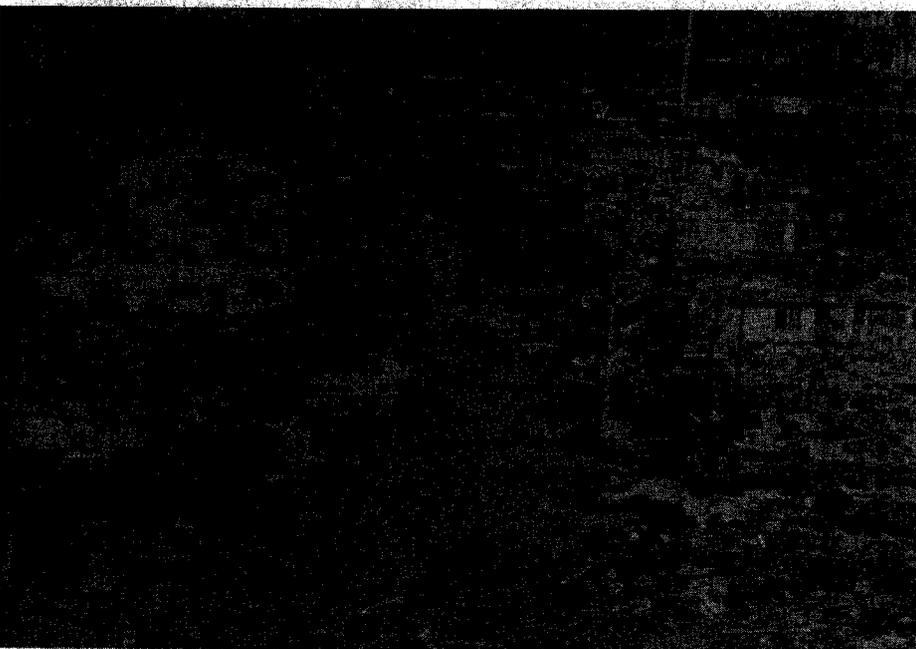
**Logistics.** Ordinary supply blocks, prepacked to support Marines in combat, are deficient in supplying units with the material necessary for humanitarian and disaster relief operations. More sandbags may be needed in a flood area and far less concertina wire. More preventative medicine and vaccinations will be consumed, but far fewer surgical supplies. Increased flexibility of supply shipments is required when units in relief operations are supported. Shipping space will be at a premium. The current supply system's inflexibility was stressed in all the after-action reports, citing unnecessary and unrequested supplies shipped to the area of operations. This can only get worse as the trend toward bureaucratic centralization continues. Units need to tailor supply requests, through message traffic, having superfluous items removed and the most needed material put in their place.

### Conclusion

The news media's ability to transmit pictures instantly from a disaster site anywhere in the world means that Marine units assigned to alleviate the situation will be placed under close (and critical) scrutiny. Any perceived inaction will be taken as a sign of insensitivity, ineptness, or both, whether justly earned or not. A commander's ingenuity and unit flexibility will be the keys to mission success. Understanding this, the commander on the scene must be provided the tools to implement his plan once decisions are made. This means providing the commander contract authority as well as an increase in flexibility from supporting units, whether close by or thousands of miles away.

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Hurricane Andrew swept through southern Florida devastating homes and displacing thousands of local residents. Marines were called upon to perform a variety of functions including setting up a tent city as well as helping coordinate cleanup efforts.

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