

Education and Training

## Pioneer Spirit in 27th Marines Switched On at MCAGCC

by Maj Thomas W. Williams

The pioneer spirit is alive and well at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC), Twentynine Palms, Calif. This is evident by the high tempo of training and field operations, which are common events in the desert surrounding the big "Sand Box."

For most of the past two years, a significant part of that tempo has been the reactivation and growth of a regiment—the 27th Marines. Prior to reactivation, two quasi-regimental headquarters were formed, one in 1979 and one in 1980, with personnel coming "out of hide" from those units assigned to Twentynine Palms. These two headquarters were to serve as the Ground Combat Element (GCE) for Phases III and IV respectively of the MCDEC-directed Mechanized Combined Arms Task Force (MCATF) Tests. In both instances, upon completion of the tests, the quasi-regimental headquarters were dissolved.

In May 1980, the activation of the 7th Marine Amphibious Brigade (7th MAB) as the Marine Corps' Near Term Prepositioned Force (NTPF) brigade made it necessary to have a regimental headquarters to serve as a more permanent GCE. Initially, a numbered infantry regiment from the 1st Marine Division was designated as the GCE. This arrangement, however, was cumbersome in meeting contingency requirements and maintaining continuity of operations for desert warfare. A need for a more permanent regimental headquarters located at Twentynine Palms as the GCE for 7th MAB was recognized. With this in mind, the Commandant directed that the 27th (Nucleus) Headquarters be activated. To officially activate the regiment, a ceremony was conducted on 17 December 1981 at which the original 27th Marine colors, on loan from the Marine Corps Museum, were passed by the Commandant of the Marine Corps to Col L.B. McHenry.

The mission statement of the 27th Marines directs that it assume command of assigned FMF garrison forces at Twentynine Palms and plan for the organization, training, rapid deployment, and employment of these forces and

such other contingency forces as may be assigned. Furthermore, the regiment is to participate in the development, testing, and evaluation of doctrine, policy, and procedures pertaining to the Marine Corps' MCATF concept. Thus, the trademarks of the regiment are combined arms operations and high mobility combat training.



The regiment's training is primarily done at the company team level. An infantry or tank company provides the basic unit for integrating antitank (TOW), artillery, engineer, reconnaissance, assault amphibious vehicle (AAV), and fire support personnel to complete the combined arms team. Training is also focused on the employment of close air support (CAS), suppression of enemy air defense (SEAD), and other supporting fires to complement high mobility combat. Garrison forces at Twentynine Palms under the command of 27th Marines continually participate in this training and the MCATF doctrinal development program. These resident commands are currently Communications Support Company, 9th Communication Battalion; 1st Battalion, 4th Marines; 3d Tank Battalion; 4th Battalion, 11th Marines; and Company "D", 3d Assault Amphibian Battalion. These five divergent units give the 27th Marines a unique combined arms flavor. Besides desert operations and high mobility training, opportunities for these units also includes providing a ma-

majority of the support for the Marine Corps Combined Arms Exercise (CAX) Program, Fire Support Coordination Application Course (FSCAC), the LFTCPac-sponsored Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) Training and other CMC or FMFPac-directed exercises at Twentynine Palms.

As a consequence of the directives to test and evaluate MCATF doctrine and to organize and train for rapid deployment as the GCE of 7th MAB for NTPF contingencies, the concept of employment for the 27th Marines embraces a regimental MCATF. Augmentation for operations and contingencies from 1st Marine Division include two infantry battalions, one artillery battalion, one AAV battalion (-), a reconnaissance company, and an engineer company. Additionally, forward antiair defense (FAAD) teams are provided by 3d MAW. Given these augmentations, which bring its total strength for operations and exercises to something in excess of 6,000 Marines, the 27th Marines has maneuver elements that integrate mechanized infantry and armor forces and are supported by mechanized and towed artillery, mobile reconnaissance, engineers, antitank (TOW), and FAAD assets.

Many improved techniques have evolved from the phase testing of the MCATF concept. Presently, the nucleus staff, in addition to the day-to-day activities of running the regiment, is developing standing operating procedures for regimental-size MCATF field operations. It is a dynamic experience to put such an awesome and powerful force into motion. The sounds and sight of the regiment with its assault battalions simultaneously attacking under the cover of its self-propelled and towed artillery fire, close air support, Cobra attack helicopters, and the employment of its direct fire weapons cannot be matched for realistic combat training.

Twentynine Palms is a big base. The ideas and concepts being pursued and developed there are just as big. The efforts to date in the development of a Marine Corps concept for MCATF operations is a mere scratch in the sand. The activation of the 27th Marines verifies that the Marine Corps is serious in developing this additional combat capability to support contingency employment in a high mobility desert environment. The officers and men of the 27th Marines are involved, doing the things they came into the Corps to do, and enjoying being field Marines. The pioneer spirit in the 27th Marines is "switched on."  
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