

Forward Deployed

The Caltrap Division
by the Staff, 3d MarDiv

Pictures line the command deck passageway, their nameplates reading as a “Who’s Who” of the Marine Corps’ most revered and proven leaders. Erskine, Shoup, Walt, Krulak, Cushman, Davis, and Wilson; these generals’ stoic reflections challenge us to recall our institution’s warfighting heritage and forewarn us to keep a weather eye out. This is 3d MarDiv, in Okinawa, Japan, where Marines and Sailors are poised and ready, steadily preparing, and standing ready for the call into the ever evolving chess match of the Western Pacific. The 3d MarDiv stands uniquely positioned on the very ground our Corps’ forefathers bought with unparalleled sacrifice.

The past has given way to a new context. Though the armistice on the Korean peninsula holds, the actions of Kim Jung-un have ushered in a new era of tension and uncertainty. The emerging challenge, driven by multinational holdings in the resource rich region, harbors the potential for a new era of tensions long anticipated by beltway think tank and Defense Department strategists. An entire MEF sits at the crossroads of the Pacific Command theater, patiently studying, adapting, and calculating the optimal posture and potential employment of its elements should the tension snap. At the forward edge of this brewing tempest stands the GCE of the III MEF, the men and women of the 3d MarDiv.

What follows is a summary of the many recognized and developing attributes of what a tour in the Division offers, both professionally and personally. The 3d MarDiv is storied, its alumni having stormed the beaches of Iwo Jima and Guam, deployed to the Republic of Vietnam, and participated throughout Iraq and Afghanistan. Service in the Caltrap Division¹ has always been one



Marines rappelling at le Shima training facility. (Photo by Cpl Janessa Pon.)

of prestige, and the current course of history and the prevailing preeminence of the Pacific region are positioning it once again to be the choice duty assignment for those who, by their nature as U.S. Marines, “march to the sound of the guns.”

Strategic Setting

The Indo-Asia Pacific operating environment² is the most complex on the planet. It is a vast, maritime environment containing the majority of the world’s population, spread across thousands of islands and littorals; trillions of dollars in the trade crossing its seas; and four of the United States’ closest allies. Throughout the region, real potential exists for major theater war involving multiple Western and Asian countries, state-on-state conflict, violent extremism, transnational crime, and every possible humanitarian crisis. Yet, amidst these highly dynamic variables, a

few defining ripples persist: the increasingly caustic threat from North Korea and the emerging challenges presented by China’s aggressive military actions to control the South and East China Seas. Both countries are redefining their regimes, at odds with international law and norms, and are continuing to threaten regional and global security.

North Korean rhetoric and aggression on the Korean peninsula has never been as intense as it is presently, with artillery exchanges with the Republic of Korea, a continuous series of ballistic missile launches toward Japan, and escalating nuclear tests. Each international sanction imposed on Kim Jung-un is met with defiance, and patience on the peninsula is wearing thin. Accordingly, a large-scale conflict could be only a miscalculation away.

Meanwhile, the South and East China Seas continue to evolve into maritime garrisons. China and others

continue to create and improve military outposts throughout the South China Sea while investing in amphibious capacity. The South China Sea is a top national security concern, as \$5.3 trillion of world commerce and \$1.2 trillion of U.S. commerce transits here annually. Defying an International Court of Arbitration ruling, Chinese warships, coast guard ships, and maritime militia patrol in ever increasing numbers continue to harass fisherman, challenge nations' sovereignty, impede freedom of navigation, and block access to global commons. International military air operations over the South and East China seas are increasing as China threatens to enforce illegal air defense identification zones. Present day allies, including some former adversaries, increasingly look to the U.S.—particularly the Marine Corps—to partner with and develop their defense capability to defend their interests against this emerging and increasingly complex problem set.

Training into the Future

Marines stationed in Okinawa enjoy regular, first-hand experience in distributed operations and, by the nature of the theater, continually expand and experiment with naval integration. Pursuing the Commandant's direction in his "Advance to Contact" FRAGO to be more "agile, flexible and adaptable," 3d MarDiv's infantry battalions spend over 50 percent of their time deployed off Okinawa. In addition to Camp Fuji, Japan, and various locations in Korea, the Division's forces deploy to Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia, Brunei, Fiji, New Caledonia, Mongolia, and Guam with more opportunities opening up in Indonesia and Vietnam. Because of our reputation for success and our noted professionalism, ally and partner nations are consistently seeking the opportunity to train and operate with Marines at all levels, from staff command post exercises to live fire and maneuver ranges.

The 3d MarDiv staff maximizes its training opportunities by shaping named exercises into mission rehearsals, pushing the staff and tactical units to evolve to meet the emerging threats.



Marines conduct vertical assault training on le Shima training facility. (Photo by Sgt Royce Dorman.)

Unlike the conflicts of the past decade, in which staffs operated from built-up safe havens with robust infrastructure, the Western Pacific requires more austere accommodations, operating with reduced and degraded communications, nimble command and control nodes, stretched logistical lines, and small units supporting unique and mobile capabilities. The Division forces have also exercised the mandate to operationalize non-standard

shipping, deploying and operating small units aboard numerous Military Sealift Command platforms—T-EPF (expeditionary fast transport ships), TAK (MPF container ships), and TAK-E (dry cargo ships) platforms, specifically. Finally, in order to support its warfighting capability, the staffs of the Division and its subordinate commands are adept in Maritime Prepositioning Force (MPF) employment, integrating MPF ships into



The Jungle Warfare Training Center is composed of some of the most difficult terrain imaginable. (Photo by Cpl Janessa Pon.)



The USNS Millinocket (T-EPF 3) in Okinawa. (Photo by MCS1 Doug Harvey.)

Through deployment via strategic airlift, use of amphibious and Maritime Sealift Command shipping assets, and opportune or contracted vessels, a distributed force continually operates as far north as Korea and as far south as Australia.



A CH-53E prepares to land on the USNS Sacagawea (T-AKE 2). (Photo by MCS1 Lance Burleson.)

operational maneuver as forces shift from one nation or land mass to another.

Due to its location and mission set, the Marines of the Division have the opportunity to lead in blue-green integration, large-scale conventional operations such as division-level amphibious operations, development of transformative concepts including expeditionary advance base operations as highlighted in *Expeditionary Force 21*,³ and security cooperation with our key international allies and partners. Okinawa also is home to the Marine Corps' only Jungle Warfighting Training School, which offers premier training in the most difficult fighting terrain in the world. There is no better location to learn about the roots and fundamentals of our Corps and lead its future transformation than here.

Sustaining into the Future

Logistics is integrated across all operations in the Pacific theater. The forward deployment of the Marine units on Okinawa engages real-world strategic mobility for every major training evolution. Through deployment via strategic airlift, use of amphibious and Maritime Sealift Command shipping assets, and opportune or contracted vessels, a distributed force continually operates as far north as Korea and as far south as Australia.

The distributed nature of 3d MarDiv stretches every functional logistics component, not just strategic mobility. Deploying battalions and smaller-sized units throughout this distributed environment provide challenges and experiences for logisticians and maintainers of all grades, from supplying ammunition and operational rations to ensuring the smooth delivery of parts through a supply chain stretching all the way back to the continental U.S. These challenges are viewed by the Marines and Sailors of 3d MarDiv, and the III MEF as a whole, as cutting edge opportunities through which new and evolving approaches to ground logistics support can be developed. These new and evolving concepts of support are not just tied to the Pacific theater in theater security and cooperation operations but are



Cultural programs like this tea ceremony help immerse Marines and their dependents in host-nation culture. (Photo by Cpl Janessa Pon.)

proofs of concept for how we will support the Marine Corps of the future.

Finally, given that the Pacific theater's most likely contingency is humanitarian assistance and disaster relief response, our logistics forces stand as the region's bid for success in its time of need. These logistics warriors are able to provide unique capabilities during these responses, such as transportation, power, medical, and engineering support, to peoples and countries that are desperate for help. These operations assist our allies and partners during times of great need and also offer a tremendous training ground to hone and develop the subject matter expertise in these critical low density skill sets that keep the 3d MarDiv ready to address our Nation's enemies in the Pacific theater.

Life in the Asia-Pacific

For single Marines and families alike, Okinawa is the best kept secret in the Marine Corps. The rich Okinawan culture, military history, mountainous jungle landscape, beautiful beaches, and renovated on-base facilities make Okinawa a genuine island adventure. From exploring ancient castle ruins to hiking beneath waterfalls, the on-island options for recreation are seemingly endless. Being forward deployed, Okinawa-based families routinely enjoy

Space-A and commercial travel to exotic locales throughout the region with top destinations being Indonesia, Bali, China, Vietnam, Korea, Australia, and mainland Japan.

The Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) Schools in Okinawa received one of the highest possible rankings across DODEA, with students earning top honors in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM courses), reading, and music. Furthermore, according to the Military Installations Department of Defense Dependents Schools (DODDS) assessment, teacher-to-pupil ratios on Okinawa annually exceed that of their stateside counterparts. One of the most unique programs in DODDS is the host-nation culture program which provides Japanese culture and language activities, helping students enjoy and appreciate living overseas and the opportunity to explore a unique and captivating people. Youth sports and activities abound with year-round options for kids to play and coach, including participation in the Far East Competitions where student athletes and scholars participate in competition with their counterparts throughout the Western Pacific.

Though getting to Okinawa is one of the hardest permanent changes of

station to make, once aboard, the opportunities for cultural enrichment, outdoor adventures, water sports, travel, and being part of a complex, important mission are worth the upfront effort. With recent improvements to the sponsorship program, much of the previously perceived stress is eliminated through personal contact with a Marine and family already on island.

Join the Best and Brightest

The halls of the Division headquarters are marked with the Marines who carried the Caltrap legacy to where it is today—43 Medal of Honor recipients, including our most recent awardee, Cpl Dakota Meyer. Now, the 3d MarDiv looks toward its future. As the force of choice in the Pacific theater, the Division and its subordinate units' staffs are constantly evolving to meet the many emerging and historical threats present in this theater by taking the lead in blue-green integration and training to be a lean and agile force that is ready to "Fight Tonight." The 3d MarDiv also remains dedicated to acting as the region's bid for success in any humanitarian assistance and disaster relief response, utilizing its superior logistical capabilities and continuing to establish relationships with its military allies and partners throughout the Western Pacific. At the forefront of it all are the forward deployed men and women of the Caltrap nation, the best and brightest.

Notes

1. The caltrap was a medieval defensive weapon used against cavalry and infantry. During the wars of the Middle Ages, defenders scattered large numbers of caltraps on the ground in front of an approaching enemy. The four-pronged, forged-in-iron caltrap was designed so that, no matter which way it landed when thrown on the ground, one point always pointed upward with three supporting it.

2. Indo-Asia Pacific operating environment includes the South and East China Seas and countries from North Korea to Australia, to India and extends across the Pacific to Hawaii.

3. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Force 21*, (Washington, DC: March 2014).

