

Where have all the Warfighters Gone

Subject Area Warfighting

EWS 2006

Where have all the Warfighters Gone

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07 February 2006

# Report Documentation Page

Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE <b>2006</b>		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2006 to 00-00-2006</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Where Have all the Warfighters Gone</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>United States Marine Corps, Command Staff College Marine Corps, University, 2076 South Street, Marine Corps Combat ,Development Command, Quantico, VA, 22134-5068</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>15</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

"While warfighting is certainly what we are about -- it is not  
and it cannot be -- all we are about."

ADM Mike Mullen, 28th Chief of Naval Operations

## Sea Power

In the Pacific Theatre of World War II (WWII), the United States Navy and Marine Corps exemplified the perfection required in amphibious operations to the world. One of these battles, the battle for Iwo Jima, burned an image into every American psyche. The flag raising on Mount Suribachi on the tiny island of Iwo Jima solidified, for many, the mission of the Navy and Marine Corps team: To fight and win their country's battles by working together to project "sea power." This sea power concept required both sides of the team to adopt a warfighter mindset, and often required United States naval vessels to take risks to help support the Marines with logistics or fire support. This lesson was paid for with the blood of Sailors and Marines at Guadalcanal, where the Fleet Commander's survival mindset almost cost the United States the campaign. When newly appointed Admiral "Bull" Halsey took the helm, the Marines were shortly resupplied and the Navy-Marine Corps team re-established their dominance in the Pacific.<sup>1</sup> Less than sixty years later, the United States Navy reveals "Sea Power 21", a naval strategy for the twenty first century that no longer emphasizes warfighting. The reality is that "Sea Power 21" allows the US Navy to degrade our Navy-Marine Corps team by establishing fiscal and doctrinal separation from the Marine Corps.

## **Fiscal Evolution**

The fiscal separation in sea power is seen very plainly in the allocation of the Navy budget. Sea power in the near future will be measured in the amount of money spent in research and development (R&D) today. To illustrate where the future of sea power will be, examine the 2005 President's Budget for the Department of the Navy, Marine Corps and Navy combined. The projected budget for fiscal year 2006 is roughly 125 billion dollars, with forty percent allocated towards R&D, or fifty two billion dollars.<sup>2</sup> After removing Navy centric programs with no influence to the Marines, the amount drops to less than a billion dollars. The remaining money of that Navy specific budget was validated because of the spending for force projection from the sea.

In the current operational environment, the Navy no longer has any need for its gigantic fleets and must realign its force structure to justify its need for its current budget. With a victory in the Cold War, came new threats that needed to be addressed by all the departments of defense. Emerging threats no longer called for a strategy to go head to head with a modern navy or incinerate the earth twenty times over with nuclear missiles launched from subsurface craft. The new enemy would never mass forces and was not influenced by diplomacy or force projection. The current Navy was not trained or ready to combat

this new enemy. Unfortunately the terrorist attacks of Al Qaida in Yemen against the USS Cole were a wake up call that the US Navy is not the Navy we need to fight against this new enemy. The way for the Navy to become part of the solution to combat this new enemy was to attach more forces to the organizations that can combat this enemy; the United States Marine Corps. The Navy-Marine Corps team warfighting ethos during the cold war existed only at the MEU-ARG level, and until Operation Desert Storm, had not existed in sustained operations since the landing at Inchon.

In March 2003 the US Navy provided further evidence an inability to remain relevant due to a loss of the warfighting spirit. The largest array of US Navy amassed since Operation Desert Shield/Storm sitting in the North Arabian Gulf (NAG) truly a show of sea power about to perform on the world stage. A portion of the unclassified war plan called for an amphibious assault on the Al Faw peninsula to retain control of key infrastructure by UK forces in the south east who will conduct initial operations well within reach of naval surface fire support. The UK Royal Marines Commandos asked for naval surface fire support none would be given, the "blue water" Navy had carriers to protect and could not come in close enough to provide fire support with Naval surface fires because of: a mine threat, or territorial waters, or need of protection to the

carrier, or requirement to fire several hundred tomahawk cruise missiles during the shock and awe phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Whatever the definitive reason the warfighting mentality was not there and all missions could have been coordinated and successfully executed. The Navy's response has been "due to threat conditions naval surface fires were not feasible." Their solution has been research and development of Extended Range Guided Munitions (ERGM). These rounds, capable of traveling over 50 nautical miles from shot to impact, will solve the Navy's concerns about supporting the Marines ashore. Really though ERGM appears to throw money at a capability when the capability exists, all that is required would be the Navy commander regaining his warfighting mentality and allowing some ships to serve in the role we have been training for, naval surface fires in conjunction with air delivered fires in conjunction with ground maneuver. If the Navy won't support during real world operations then Marines should stop training to a capability during peacetime. That training however, is what controls what funds are naval and just for the navy in spending. Similarly, the percentage of the budget allocated to true support of littoral operations does not reflect the doctrinal separation called for in Sea Power 21.

## Doctrinal disillusion

This doctrinal separation is carefully worded as a deviation from littoral warfare, where ships could be put in harms way, to "a broadened strategy in which naval forces are fully integrated into global joint operations against regional and transnational dangers."<sup>3</sup> What this means is the Navy is allocate more to its budget by increasing its relevancy in the current operating environment. In the 2005 Analysis of FY 2005 Defense Budget Request, Steven Kosiak states only 1.45 billion of the requested 44 billion is being put into the building of the Navy's new destroyer, DD(X), that will be capable of "a substantial land attack capability."<sup>4</sup> The remainder of the allocation from the department of defense budget still resides with the Navy. This 1.45 billion is a minuscule percentage (3%) comparative to what they allocate to the strictly "blue water" navy functions which can be assigned a percentage as high as 34% of the total navy R&D budget. Once again evidence of fiscal separation by the Navy from the Navy-Marine Corps team. Though fiscal and doctrinal separation are closely tied evidence usually lumps together as doctrine written in hopes of achieving a fiscal gain, or the most common doctrinal new ideas that require complete reallocation, achieving again separation from the warfighting mentality.



The doctrinal separation of the Navy-Marine Corps Team comes in other forms, the first is in establishment of new organizations that add little but money to the Navy's increasing budget. The shift from the open water or "blue water" naval battles, which were prepared for by all services during the cold war, was no longer justified. The budget however needed to be justified. This "blue water" Navy views force projection as the air craft carrier's air wing in addition are the cruiser destroyer ships and their Tomahawk Cruise missiles. The other side of the Navy referred to as "gator" Navy, is designed to deal with Marines and are required by their ship's mission to embark Marines and take them where they are needed, remaining in support of the Marine landing force. The traditional landing force is the Marine expeditionary unit (MEU). Currently the mission to embark the MEU is accomplished with the organization of the amphibious ready group (ARG) and, the newest attempt to justify the unequal share of a defense budget, the expeditionary strike group (ESG).

**This is my baby and it is ugly**

The west coast ESG trials have been increasingly successful for both departments of the Navy. However, just because Marines have squeezed an unexpected value out of the ESG does not make it an efficient unit, or a valid warfighting concept. With all the higher headquarters now embarked aboard shipping, the raid

force commanders usually a captain now works for a lieutenant colonel who works for a colonel who works for a one star flag officer. The captain's higher headquarters and required support staff now outnumber the effective combat power being projected ashore.

Another selling point for the ESG concept was the fire support available now to the MEU. Often the MEU's fire supporters now are appointed the one star commander's fire supporters. This leverage gives the Marines a slice of the very hard to come by naval surface fire support ammunition training allocation. The allocation slice allows training which not every Marine observers or naval ground spot teams are fortunate to receive at their introductory schools.

The ESG has evolved solely to justify maintaining the current fleet. By doing so the ESG staff has concealed the promise of an increase in warfighting and sea power with more commands and the same struggle for the promised capabilities. This is shown in the assets an ESG now adds to the ARG an additional Cruiser (CG), Destroyer (DDG), Fast Frigate (FFG) and a Los Angeles Class Submarine (SSN). This new sea power adds dimension to the ARGs that were previously composed of one amphibious assault ship (LHD or LHA), and two smaller amphibians, the amphibious transport dock (LPD) and dock landing ship (LSD). However these assets are not required to even be

working in the same theatre or even under the same operational control as was the case during the recent deployment where ESG craft was taken by the fleet commander while the ARG and MEU simply had another headquarters on top of them.<sup>5</sup>

The benefits for the ESG is the "blue water" Navy finding a way into the Navy-Marine Corps team, by doing this, the Navy's budget is now a naval when convenient and the addition of some Marine Corps requirements means more money added to the collective naval budget. This new naval budget can later be reallocated as has become the latest trend. In the current and future operating environments the MEU disembarks and uses the shipping as a means of maintaining aircraft and keep Class IX parts close at hand. Teamwork is essential to projecting sea power in adverse conditions and against a thinking enemy.

Expeditionary strike group three fired over forty-five simulated Tomahawk missiles during the MEU's supporting arms exercise. No coordination was done prior to or while firing. Yet the sources of these orders to fire were supposed to be achieved by the ESG commander, a one star flag officer, either Navy or Marine. In times of war only a three star admiral has the authority to order the release of each million dollar weapon. No coordination was conducted by either side, yet these missiles were striking targets sometimes within a kilometer or two of Marine forces already on the ground.

The working relationship of the MEU and its new partner at sea, the ESG Commander, has improved. Many members of the third west coast trial, ESG five feel success has been moderately achieved at many levels throughout this new expeditionary force. However, fires capability during the transition ashore of the MEU is still in need of remediation. Working thru many military instructors and dedicated civilian contractors at Expeditionary Warfare Training Group Pacific (EWTGPAC), ESG five learned lessons and began planning and coordinating for the formerly Supporting Arms Coordination Exercises (SACEX) of which the traditional MEU did one during their six month work-up cycle and, pass or fail, the MEU could deploy. The ESGs were now required to conduct three Expeditionary Fires Exercises and, pass or fail, the MEU and ESG would still be allowed to deploy. Staff officers on both sides struggled to acquire new equipment to alter NAVSEA plans of action and milestones in order to upgrade the flag ship of ESG-5 while still pier-side. In order to utilize all current available technology, ESG 5 harnessed experts from the military and civilian world as well as training agencies like, MAGTF Information Systems Training Center (MISTC) and Marine Corps Tactical System Support Activity (MCTSSA). The latter in particular were invaluable to the training of the users/supervisors which had to be able to use this equipment, and function as a force fires center for the ESG.

The purpose of all of this effort was to allow the ESG to conduct fire support from afloat and transition control ashore utilizing technology to its maximum potential. As the amphibious doctrine states the supporting arms coordination center (SACC) is manned by both Navy and Marine personnel. The SACC provides two things, capability to coordinate fires for maneuver forces ashore, and transitional control of fires ashore so that the Navy can take over coordination as the MEU forces phase ashore. The success of the ESG was due in little part to the ESG and more in part to the ability of the small unit leaders to accomplish any task asked of them by their commander.

The Navy can utilize some of the money it has said it would use to support littoral warfare to dump back into blue water assets that the Marines really cannot use except in training. Only in training, however because the last time the US Navy had the opportunity to utilize its Surface Fire Support assets the way they sell them in "Forward...from the Sea" was at the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom. This was justified as not a legitimate use of assets because Royal Marine Commandos were in-charge of the operation at the Al Faw Peninsula. While most of the After Action Reports from the Navy are classified, territorial water with neighboring countries was a huge factor in the participation. Yet three UK Royal Navy Frigates did provide surface fire support to joint and combined ground forces on the

Al Faw Peninsula. The US Navy had its chance to prove that those Mk 45 gun mounts are not just for decoration and they chose not to violate territorial waters.

### **Calling all bulls**

"Force Net" is the over arching concept of Sea Power 21. Force net is the Navy adopting network centric warfare, merely to fill a void where they have perceived one. In their over reliance on computers and technology, they have now become the guardians of the Ethernet and will protect the network of the US armada. An armada that requires millions of gallons of fossil fuels it takes a day to operate and maintain. In order to protect the network in the littoral so that way the Navy can kick out the Marines from the LPD 17 and LHD and then do their part to help protect the force net. The Navy will operate primarily to facilitate the Marines required reports and secondarily to close with and destroy their enemy. The Navy providing the equivalent of 155mm warheads fired from over fifty miles away and only secondly to protecting the "net." The Marines continue to fight and win its nations battles and fight along side the Army and those nations who dare take up arms against those who aim to extinguish a free way of life. As the "modern" navy fights harder to remain out of harms way than it does against the enemy. Using fiscal and doctrinal separation and loss of the warfighting ethos has made it clear America

needs another "Bull" Halsey. The next bull may be in the Navy somewhere we need him to lead the charge for a Navy of warfighters.

**WORD COUNT = 2065**

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> "Naval Battle of Guadalcanal." *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*. 2006 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naval\\_Battle\\_of\\_Guadalcanal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naval_Battle_of_Guadalcanal)> (6 February 2006)

<sup>2</sup> "Highlights of the Department of the Navy FY 2006/FY 2007 President's Budget"

<sup>3</sup> "Sea Power 21- Projecting Decisive Joint Capabilities." *Proceedings*. October 2002 <<http://www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/cno/proceedings.html> Sea Power 21> (6 February 2006)

<sup>4</sup> "FY 2005 Budget Analysis."  
<[http://www.csbaonline.org/4Publications/Archive/R.20040411.FY\\_05\\_Analysis/R.20040411.FY\\_05\\_Analysis.pdf](http://www.csbaonline.org/4Publications/Archive/R.20040411.FY_05_Analysis/R.20040411.FY_05_Analysis.pdf)>

<sup>5</sup> Personal experience while deployed with ESG-5 during West Pacific Deployment 2005.