

24th Marine Expeditionary Unit Assumes the Watch as Littoral Combat Force-24

From II MEF Communication Strategy & Operations, May 29, 2026



PUERTO RICO – The 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit has officially assumed the mission as the premier tactical force-in-readiness within the U.S. Southern Command Area of Responsibility. Operating under the designation of Littoral Combat Force-24, the command offers tactical options via an agile Marine Air-Ground Task Force of over 1,300 Marines and Sailors to the theater. Commanded by U.S. Marine Corps Col. Ryan Lynch, LCF-24 is directly nested under Joint Task Force 84-2 to support Operation Southern Spear.

“The Marines and Sailors of LCF-24 are postured to execute all prescribed mission sets directed by our higher echelons of leadership; to deter the threats facing our hemisphere today,” said Col. Lynch. “Through our transition with the 22nd MEU, we have seamlessly assumed the watch. Our posture is active, our forces are integrated, and we are committed to standing as the regional security partner of choice.”

Operation Southern Spear and Mission Essential Tasks

While in theater, LCF-24 will serve as the immediate crisis response force for USSOUTHCOM. The MAGTF is certified to execute a wide array of mission essential tasks, including but not limited to Quick Reaction Force operations such as embassy reinforcement and the tactical recovery of aircraft personnel, while standing ready to support disaster relief activities.

While operating in the contested littorals, LCF-24 also provides the combatant commander a flexible force capable of conducting maritime interdiction operations against sanctioned activities and illicit trafficking. The MAGTF will actively defend the U.S. homeland by disrupting networks utilized by Designated Terrorist Organizations and narco-terrorists.

A Purpose-Built Force for the Littorals

Distinct from a standard Amphibious Ready Group/MEU deployment, LCF-24 is a purpose-built MAGTF engineered for distributed operations. The force maximizes its rapid littoral maneuver capabilities by operating from both shore-based nodes and amphibious transport dock USS *Fort Lauderdale*, which is exclusively aligned to support the MAGTF's mission.

Nested Under National Strategy

The deployment of LCF-24 directly supports national defense priorities and the strategic objectives of USSOUTHCOM.

"Our success in Operation Southern Spear relies on our ability to out-maneuver and overmatch the illicit networks threatening the region," said U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Calvert L. Worth, commanding general of II Marine Expeditionary Force. "Littoral Combat Force-24 provides the exact combination of precision capability and interoperability we need. They are not just a crisis response force; they provide options to the Combatant Commander and serve as a tool for building partner capacity and securing the advantage across all domains."

Ultimately, this tactical execution nests directly within the theater-wide strategic objectives of U.S. Southern Command. The presence of LCF-24 serves as a powerful deterrent against malign state actors and reinforces the security of the homeland.

“The Western Hemisphere is no longer a permissive environment for narco-terrorists, criminal syndicates, or their state sponsors,” stated U.S. Marine Corps Gen. Francis L. Donovan, Commander of U.S. Southern Command. “With Littoral Combat Force-24 taking the helm of tactical operations, we are sending an unambiguous message: the United States is committed to defending our homeland and securing a prosperous, stable hemisphere alongside our enduring partners.”

As LCF-24 begins its tenure in the USSOUTHCOM AOR, the focus remains steadfast: defend the homeland, dismantle narco-terrorist networks, counter adversary disinformation, and ensure the United States remains the partner of choice for regional security.

LMADIS Prepares for Future Fight



U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Angel Lopez, a low altitude air defense gunner assigned to 3rd Low Altitude Air Defense Battalion, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, guides a Light Marine Air Defense Integrated System during a ground-based air defense exercise as part of Weapons and Tactics Instructor course 1-25 at Tacts Airfield near Wellton, Arizona, Oct. 10, 2024. *U.S. MARINE CORPS | Lance Corporal Micah Thompson*

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION YUMA, Ariz. – The U.S. Marine Corps has taken significant strides in enhancing its air defense capabilities since the introduction of the Light Marine Air-Defense Integrated System in October 2022. This ground-based system is designed to deter and neutralize unmanned aircraft systems, addressing the evolving threats faced in modern warfare.

The LMADIS consists of two all-terrain Polaris MRZR vehicles – one serving as a command unit, while the other is equipped with advanced sensors and signal-jamming technology.

For the first time, LMADIS has been integrated into the Marine Corps' premier advanced aviation school at Marine Aviation

Weapons and Tactics Squadron One (MAWTS-1) – Weapons and Tactics Instructor course, WTI 1-25 – as an employable capability throughout each evolution, showcasing its operational viability and reinforcing the Marine Corps' commitment to enhancing air defense.

“The significance of being out here for the first time is us being able to employ LMADIS in a controlled exercise scenario, safely testing limits and seeing what all the systems can provide to the Marine Air-Ground Task Force at large,” said 1st Lieutenant Gordon Armstrong, LMADIS Platoon Commander, 3rd Low Altitude Air Defense Battalion.

As part of ongoing Force Design initiatives, the Marine Corps is focusing on distributed maritime operations and reintroducing short to medium-range air and missile defense systems to address the need for an organic air defense capability.

LMADIS systems and teams are typically deployed worldwide, limiting exposure to fleet Marine forces in garrison. The LMADIS team's integration with WTI 1-25 provides a valuable opportunity for Marines to train hands-on with other units and capabilities, integrating their tactics into a broader operational framework.

“Having LMADIS teams here at WTI allows us to integrate with the other agencies and into the broader systems that we test here; it allows us to incorporate everyone else's tactics into our tactics,” Armstrong said. “As we grow, we will be working with other aviation units to mobilize and integrate with the other elements by the final exercise, simulating a larger operational scenario.”

The WTI 1-25 curriculum offers multiple training evolutions with different scenarios for the LMADIS teams to test when and where the system is most effective. As the course advances, similarly the evolutions and scenarios increase in

complexity.

“With the WTI structure, we are able to start small and work to gradually build the scenarios,” said Major Dusty Blanchard, Ground-Based Air Defense Division Head, MAWTS-1.

Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Eric M. Smith, emphasizes a realistic, creative approach to training in his recent planning guidance.

“We must fully integrate constructive and virtual training into our exercises to complement live force actions so that we can train with the full complement of our new capabilities,” Smith said.

As the course progresses, the training evolutions begin to incorporate live UAS operations. This live-fire component allows LMADIS operators to practice identifying, tracking, and simulate neutralizing UAS threats in real time, enhancing their tactical proficiency and response capabilities.

A testament to its mobility and versatility, the LMADIS was rapidly transported on various Marine Corps aircraft platforms throughout the training.

“For the first time, we will be implementing the LMADIS fully capable and fully transportable via MV-22B Ospreys and CH-53E Super Stallions, demonstrating its versatility and readiness for deployment in various environments,” said Sergeant Angel Lopez, LMADIS team leader with 3rd LAAD Battalion. “This allows us to work with the flying divisions within MAWTS-1 to get us to our target location.”

The successful integration of the LMADIS in WTI 1-25 represents a pivotal advancement in the Marine Corps’ air defense strategy, ensuring that LAAD Marines are equipped with the tools, knowledge, and experience necessary to operate effectively on an increasingly complex battlefield.

New Commander Takes Charge of Pacific Marines



U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Gen. William M. Journey, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific, gives his final remarks as commander during the MARFORPAC change of command ceremony on Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Sept. 12, 2024. *U.S. Marine Corps | Staff Sgt. Ash McLaughlin*

MARINE CORPS BASE HAWAII – Lieutenant General William M. Journey relinquished command of U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific to Lieutenant General James F. Glynn during a ceremony aboard Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Sept. 12, 2024. Journey also retired from the Marine Corps during the ceremony.

“You don’t get here by happenstance,” said General Eric M. Smith, commandant of the Marine Corps. “You get here by determination, by hard work, by commitment to your profession. You’re hand selected to come here based on your integrity,

your vision, and your warfighting expertise.”

Journey, a native of Statesville, North Carolina, commanded MARFORPAC since September 2022. After graduating from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in 1987, he enlisted in the Marine Corps and retired with more than 37 years of service.

“The Marines and Sailors standing in front of you today represent two Marine Expeditionary Forces, both I and III MEF, and our headquarters,” stated Journey during his last address as commander. “The MEFs and MARFORPAC represent approximately two-thirds of the entire United States Marines Corps’ combat power. Every day, over 80,000 Marines and Sailors make sacrifices for our country, and we do not forget them for their service.”

During Journey’s tenure, Pacific Marines participated in several significant events, including the first deployment of the Amphibious Combat Vehicle with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, the redesignation of 12th Marine Regiment to 12th Marine Littoral Regiment, Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 3’s transition from the RQ-21A to the MQ-9A MUX/MALE, and support to more than 120 exercises and engagements throughout the Indo-Pacific theater.

Reflecting on the achievements and progress made while in command, Journey highlighted the dedication and readiness of Pacific Marines.

“They stand ready to fight – and to fight and win – on behalf of our nation and on behalf of our nation’s commitment to our allies and to our partners,” Journey said. “Our capabilities of readiness are possible because of strong partnerships and our strong alliances.”

A native of Albany, New York, Glynn graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and commissioned in 1989. He most recently served as deputy commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs,

based in Quantico, Virginia.

“You should expect me to be out front ensuring that you have what you need and that you are taken care of so that we can achieve the things in support of our partners and Allies,” Glynn said during his first remarks to Pacific Marines. “So, we can do the things that are required to prevail – that are expected of us as individuals and as a group. So, know those standards and exceed those standards at every occasion.”

The ceremony featured marching units, the MARFORPAC Band, a combined color guard representing MARFORPAC and its subordinate commands, an artillery salute, and the traditional passing of the unit colors from the outgoing to the incoming commander, signifying the transfer of authority and accountability of the command.

Marine Corps Adds AGM-158A Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile to F/A-18 Arsenal



U.S. Marines load an AGM-158A joint air-to-surface standoff missile on an F/A-18 Hornet assigned to VMFA-232 during the AGM-158A validation and verification at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, California, Aug. 27, 2024. *U.S. Marine Corps | Lance Cpl. Jennifer Sanchez*

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION MIRAMAR, California – Marines with Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 11 and Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 232 became the first to conduct ordnance operations with the Marine Corps' newest F/A-18 Hornet weapon, the AGM-158A joint air-to-surface standoff missile, during validation and verification testing at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, California, Aug. 27-28, 2024.

The AGM-158A JASSM is a conventional, stealthy, air launched ground attack cruise missile with a range of 230 miles. In 2018, the United States employed the JASSM in combat for the first time, fired from U.S. Air Force B-1B Lancer bombers, destroying a Syrian chemical weapons manufacturer and proving the JASSM's effectiveness.

“The integration of the AGM-158A joint air-to-surface standoff

missile into the F/A-18's arsenal significantly enhances the Hornet's capabilities, enabling it to strike targets from well beyond the reach of enemy air defenses," said Major Bradley Kirby, an aviation ordnance officer with 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing.

Marines conducted validation and verification testing by loading an AGM-158A JASSM onto an F/A-18 assigned to VMFA-232 to evaluate the loading procedures, connecting hardware and software – a required protocol before the JASSM is incorporated in the Marine Corps arsenal.

As the Marine Corps tailors its advanced fighter attack aircraft and ushers in fifth-generation aircraft, it is also integrating new munitions with increased range, speed and lethality.

Marine Corps strike fighter platforms are postured to acquire long-range, maritime strike capabilities with the inclusion of the AGM-158B joint air-to-surface standoff missile extended range and AGM-158C long range anti-ship missile on the F-35B/C weapons integration roadmap.

"The JASSM not only surpasses the capabilities of any other weapon currently in the Hornet's extensive weapons portfolio, but also the Marine Corps at large," Kirby said. "This added capability will greatly increase 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing's ability to support the joint force and enable greater freedom of maneuver across all operational domains."

Pacific Marines, Philippine

Marines Meet for Annual Staff Talks



U.S. Marine Corps Col. Christopher Oliver, left, assistant chief of staff, G-5, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific, and Philippine Marine Corps Col. Bayani Curaming, Chief of Philippine Marine Staff, have a conversation during staff talks on Camp H.M. Smith, Hawaii, Feb. 13. *U.S. Marine Corps | Lance Cpl. Matthew Benfield*

CAMP H.M. SMITH, Hawaii – Senior leaders from U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific, and the Philippine Marine Corps held their annual Marine-to-Marine Staff Talks here from Feb. 12 to 15.

The annual Marine-to-Marine Staff Talks are a key component of the U.S.-Philippine defense relationship. They serve as a forum for senior military leaders to exchange views on regional security issues and enhance bilateral cooperation.

The discussions from this week further reinforce the strong and enduring bond between both nations and their commitment to regional stability and security.

“The importance of integrating our militaries cannot be overstated,” stated Marine Corps Brigadier General Daniel L. Shipley, deputy commander of U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific. “Regular discussions, such as these staff talks, and consistent engagement during exercises like Balikatan and KAMANDAG, are key reasons why we are able to come together to rapidly support each other as we are currently doing in Mindanao in response to the flooding.”

The annual event emphasized the significance of the U.S.-Philippine military relationship and provided an opportunity to collaborate on common interests. During the three-day meeting, leaders from both militaries discussed a variety of topics including recent experiences with amphibious operations, methods of modernizing training, and advancing capabilities to remain ready and responsive in the Indo-Pacific region.

This year’s iteration focused heavily on the development of the Republic of the Philippines-U.S. Mutual Defense Board-Security Engagement Board cycle and development of an assessment model for current and future engagements. The MDB-SEB cycle enhances defense cooperation between the two countries, while the assessment model will enhance improvements to the readiness and capability of both forces. This process helped compile a list of events for 2025 that will serve as a foundation for the rest of the MDB-SEB cycle.

Representatives participating in the PMC-MARFORPAC Staff Talks discussed future exercises meant to strengthen interoperability between the two services. Militaries from both countries regularly participate in a variety of activities and exercises, such as Balikatan and KAMANDAG, to mutually develop their defense capabilities while aligning to

common goals shared between both nations.

During the opening program, the Head of the Philippine Marine Corps delegation, Col. Bayani V. Curaming, the Chief of Marine Staff, PMC, emphasized that “everything about bilateral engagements between the two Marine Corps should be contextualized and in-sync with realization of the Archipelagic Defense and the Marine Corps’ Strategic Posturing that goes with it.”

The U.S. and the Philippines have a long-standing diplomatic relationship dating back to 1951, with the signing of the Mutual Defense Treaty, which serves as the foundation for close security cooperation. More than 70 years later, the two nations continue to work closely together towards common goals based on shared values and interests in the region.

Chesty XVI, Mascot of Marine Barracks Washington, Promoted to Lance Corporal



Chesty XVI, mascot of the Barracks, receives his promotion warrant during a ceremony at Marine Barracks Washington, Jan. 17. Chesty XVI was promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal by Carlos Del Toro, secretary of the Navy. *U.S. Marine Corps | Lance Cpl. Chloe N. McAfee*

In a momentous ceremony at Marine Barracks Washington last week, presided over by Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro, Chesty XVI, the official mascot of Marine Barracks Washington, was promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal.

“At a time when our nation is being challenged in many different ways, we need Marines like each and every one of you to represent everything that’s great about this country,” Del Toro said. “And Chesty XVI represents everything that’s great about the Marine Corps.”

After the Battle of Belleau Wood, U.S. Marines adopted the moniker “devil dogs,” a term believed to have originated from

the defeated Germans who, in awe of their tenacious adversaries, allegedly referred to them as “teufelhunden,” meaning hell hounds. Following World War I, the nickname gained prominence and began to feature prominently on Marine Corps recruitment posters, often accompanied by an iconic depiction of a scowling, helmet-clad English bulldog, symbolizing the indomitable spirit of the Marine Corps. While the nickname played a significant role in shaping the Marine Corps identity in the 20th century, it’s worth noting that there isn’t evidence to confirm its origin as a reference to the Marines by German troops.

Chesty XVI’s Pup Predecessors

During his tenure as the commanding officer of the Marine Barracks at Quantico, Virginia, Brig. Gen. Smedley D. Butler extended the nascent tradition by enlisting “Private Jiggs” into the Marine Corps on Oct. 14, 1922. Jiggs was born in Philadelphia on May 22, 1921, and boasted an impressive pedigree. The mascot experienced rapid promotions within the ranks, attaining the position of Sergeant Major on July 17, 1924.

Remaining true to custom, the Barracks welcomed Private First Class Chauncy into its ranks in 1956. Following Chauncy, Chesty I assumed the mantle, bearing the name in homage to the legendary Marine Lt. Gen. Lewis “Chesty” Puller, the most decorated Marine in the history of the Corps. Chesty I made his debut during the very first Evening Parade on July 5, 1957.

Over the years, numerous English bulldogs have faithfully served at the Barracks, with some receiving formal burial honors within the Barracks’ hallowed grounds. This enduring tradition underscores the profound connection between legend and the fighting spirit of every Marine, past and present.

Former U.S. Marine Keith Burns, who served as a Marine

Barracks Washington mascot handler in 1998, had the opportunity to escort Chesty XI to the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Belleau Wood.

“As this battle was the birthplace of the mascot’s role, being there 80 years later with our mascot was humbling and awe-inspiring,” said Burns. “Being part of an ongoing tribute to our history and moniker of ‘devil dog’ made me feel even more connected to the Corps and served as a reminder of how our past continues to shape our present, and future.”

Chesty XVI enlisted in the Marine Corps February 2022. He relieved Chesty XV of his duties on May 6, 2022, and marched in his debut parade that evening.

Chesty XVI’s promotion to Lance Corporal not only embodies the Marine Corps’ legacy but also highlights the mission of Marine Barracks Washington to represent the Marine Corps to the nation. The “Oldest Post of the Corps” continues to stand as a keeper of tradition and beacon of the Marine Corps’ values, inspiring patriotism and showcasing the unwavering commitment of Marines who have served, are

BAE Systems Delivers First Production-Ready ACV Command Variant to U.S. Marine Corps



BAE Systems' ACV-C variant. *BAE Systems*
STAFFORD, Va. – BAE Systems delivered the first Amphibious Combat Vehicle Command and Control (ACV-C) variant under the full-rate production contract to the U.S. Marine Corps.

The ACV-C will provide Marines with a mobile command center which enables situational awareness and operations planning in the battlespace.

ACV-C provides true open-ocean and ship-to-objective amphibious capability, land mobility, survivability and ample growth capacity and flexibility to incorporate and adapt future technologies. Through previous studies with the Marine Corps, BAE Systems has proven that the ACV is truly customizable and has the built-in growth capacity to integrate future mission critical technologies, including new battle management capabilities, advanced communications, multi-domain targeting management, beyond-line-of-sight sensors, and manned-unmanned teaming (MUM-T) with autonomous and unmanned systems.

“We are thrilled to deliver this critical capability into the hands of Marines in the field,” said Garrett Lacaillade, vice president of the amphibious vehicles product line for BAE

Systems. “As the Marines begin to familiarize themselves with the new ACV-C, BAE Systems and our strategic partner Iveco Defence Vehicles remain ready to fulfill any of the Corps’ critical amphibious warfighting needs to ensure the Fleet Marine Force is mission ready.”

The Marine Corps and BAE Systems entered full-rate production on the ACV program with a contract award in December 2020. Currently, two of the four ACV variants are in production today at BAE Systems facility in York, Pennsylvania: the ACV Personnel variant (ACV-P), which provides transport for 13 combat-loaded Marines and three crew, and the new ACV-C variant. Production Representative Test Vehicles are currently in production for ACV 30mm (ACV-30). ACV-30 is armed with a 30mm Remote Turret System that provides the lethality and protection Marines need while leaving ample room for troop capacity and payload.

The fourth variant on contract, the ACV Recovery variant (ACV-R) recently completed phase one of the design process. BAE Systems will deliver production representative test vehicles in 2025. ACV-R will provide direct field support, maintenance, and recovery to the ACV family of vehicles.

ACV production and support is taking place at BAE Systems locations in Stafford, Virginia; San Jose, California; Sterling Heights, Michigan; Aiken, South Carolina; and York, Pennsylvania.

New Air Defense System

Advances Corps' Air Dominance



U.S. Marines with Marine Corps Systems Command fire a Stinger Missile from a Marine Air Defense Integrated System (MADIS) at Yuma Proving Ground, Arizona, Dec. 13. U.S. *Marine Corps* | *Virginia Guffey*

YUMA PROVING GROUND, Arizona – The Marine Corps is one step closer to defeating unmanned aircraft systems. In December, Program Executive Officer Land Systems successfully tested the Marine Air Defense Integrated System, or MADIS, low-rate initial production model, hitting several launched drones during a live-fire test at the Yuma Proving Ground in Arizona.

The live-fire test subjected MADIS to actual battlefield scenarios, where it detected, tracked, identified, and defeated unmanned aerial threats. “MADIS can complete the entire kill chain, and we witness that during this event,” said Col. Andrew Konicki, program manager for Ground Based Air Defense. “It is a linchpin for mission success and our ability to neutralize airborne threats...which in turn, increases our lethality.”

MADIS is a short-range, surface-to-air system that enables Low Altitude Air Defense Battalions to deter and neutralize unmanned aircraft systems and fixed wing/rotary wing aircraft.

Mounted aboard two Joint Light Tactical Vehicles, the system is a complementary pair. MADIS includes multiple disparate systems, including radar systems, surface-to-air missiles, and command and control elements. In layman's terms, one detects, and the other attacks.

Drones continue to be a threat, especially with the emergence of easily accessible, commercial off-the-shelf products. MADIS uses real-time communication and coordination to destroy or neutralize low-altitude aerial threats in defense of the Marine Air Ground Task Force.

"The importance of countering UAS threats cannot be overstated," said Konicki. "We see it all over the news. MADIS is the key. We're excited to get this out to Marines."

During the test, MADIS successfully tracked and hit multiple targets using the Stinger missiles and 30mm cannon. Information passed through the Common Aviation Command and Control System to the "fighting pair" of vehicles, executing the engagements while continuing to track other UAS targets.

"We've taken multiple disparate commercial off-the-shelf and government off-the-shelf technologies and put them together," said Konicki. "This is a capability the Marine Corps has never had, and it was a challenge for the acquisition community. This test event shows we met that challenge."

The program office has additional live-fire testing planned for new equipment training, system verification testing, and initial operational test and evaluation in FY24, prior to the start of fielding, said Maj. Craig Warner, product manager for Future Weapons Systems. The 3rd Littoral Anti-Air Battalion will be the first battalion in the Marine Corps to receive the MADIS.

Marine Corps 'Monster Machine' Enters Full-Rate Production



Two of 13th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion's rough terrain container handlers posture at terminal 46 in Seattle, Wash. outside of CenturyLink Field Event Center where Soldiers are setting up a hospital in support of the Department of Defense COVID-19 response, April 4. U.S. Army Reserve / Maj. Brandon R. Mace

QUANTICO, Va. – A Marine Corps vehicle designed to transport International Standards Organization containers to supply Fleet Marines just reached a key acquisition milestone.

The Rough Terrain Container Handler moves 20-to-40-foot ISO containers and shelters on rough terrain, beaches and other surfaces to assist with land and amphibious missions. The machine can lift and transport objects weighing more than 50,000 pounds.

In September 2020, an upgraded version of the material handler reached full-rate production.

"The Rough Terrain Container Handler resupplies Marines during battle," said Matt Wilson, project officer for the RTCH program at Marine Corps Systems Command. "It's a big, monster machine that you'd have to see in operation to really appreciate."

RTCH operates worldwide on rough surfaces, including sandy terrain, and is capable of ordnance ammunition handling

operations. The vehicle can be quickly configured for transport by road, rail and marine landing craft, or by air in C-5 or C-17 cargo aircraft.

The vehicle is commonly used during amphibious landings, where engineer equipment operators can employ the RTCH to offload containers, stage them on the beach and push cargo and supplies out to Marines as needed. The machine can also travel through shallow waters and transport ISO containers onto floating bridges called causeways.

The Marine Corps began fielding the RTCH in 2006. While the vehicle has served Marines well, MCSC is always looking for ways to improve their technologies and maintain a competitive advantage over adversaries.

“We communicated with Fleet Marines to determine what they wanted to see improve within the Rough Terrain Container Handler,” Wilson said. “We also looked at what the manufacturer could improve on the system.”

After assessing this input, MCSC decided to upgrade the RTCH through the Service Life Extension Program as opposed to field an entirely new vehicle. The RTCH SLEP gives the RTCH at least another 10 years of operation, said Wilson.

The SLEP also saves the Corps time. Instead of beginning at the start of the process – Milestone Decision Authority – the program began at the Milestone C stage, just prior to the production and deployment phase.

“This has been a very streamlined process,” said Jarrett. “Instead of testing every part of this RTCH, which has already been done before, we only had to focus on the specific modifications to ensure those still met the requirements of the legacy vehicle and what we wanted to do with our SLEP program.”

Since MCSC awarded the RTCH SLEP contract in January 2020, both the Army and Navy have joined the Marine Corps' SLEP to acquire additional machines.

"The Army and Navy are now involved in the program," said Wilson. "When the Marines, Navy and Army seek the same materiel solution for the RTCH, it benefits all in Acquisitions, Provisioning and sets the Marine, Sailor and Soldier up for success."

Marine Corps Fields New Service-Wide Pistol



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Michael Pritchard, 423rd Security Forces Squadron (SFS) patrolman, fires an M18 handgun during a qualification course, at RAF Molesworth, England, July 28, 2020. The M18 is now being adopted by the U.S. Marine Corps. U.S. Air Force / Senior Airman Eugene Oliver

QUANTICO, Va. – For the first time since former President Ronald Reagan's Administration, the Marine Corps is fielding a new service-wide pistol replacement.

The M18 comprises capabilities previous pistols lacked. For example, the M9 – the most widely issued pistol among Marines – is a steel-framed, single-action/double-action hammer-fired pistol. This means it is a heavier, metal gun with two different trigger pulls for single- and double-action.

Conversely, the M18 is lighter and does not include two different trigger pulls.

“For some Marines, having two trigger pulls, like with the M9, is difficult to get used to because different forces are acting upon the gun,” said Sgt. Randall McClellan, pistol program manager with the Weapons Training Battalion aboard Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia. “With the M18, the trigger is going to be the same weight every time.”

The M18 has increased modularity when compared with previous pistols. The gun includes interchangeable components to fit small, medium or large hands. It comprises a receiver module inside the pistol grip that enables Marines to remove the trigger mechanism and insert it into a new grip size, said Nelson.

The weapon also includes an accessory rail that enables Marines to attach lights or lasers underneath.

“Marines can attach more things to the M18, such as a red-dot sight, once approved for use,” said McClellan. “The modularity and ergonomics of the gun benefits the warfighter, as they can change parts out more easily.”

Army collaboration

The handgun is an Army-led program fielded in 2017. The program consists of the M17—the full-size pistol—and the M18. MCSC is only purchasing the M18, the compact variant, as well as holsters through the Army contract.

The Marine Corps’ Combat Development and Integration collaborated with the Army on the development of the M18 requirement. CD&I requirements managers and other Marines actively participated in the assessment and selection of the MHS.

“The M18 is unique in that it is a utility player capable of supporting a broad range of missions in which a handgun is

required,” said Billy Epperson, the Infantry Weapon Capabilities Integration officer at CD&I. “Because of this versatility, the M18 will replace the four pistols in the Marine Corps inventory.”

Tom Vass, the Army’s project officer for the M18, believes the weapon will greatly benefit Marines, noting how it is a more reliable, accurate and effective pistol than previous ones.

“Overall, the adoption of the M18 by the Marine Corps is an extremely positive decision that will benefit the Corps and enhance Marines’ safety and effectiveness when conducting missions,” said Vass.

‘Very emotional’ transition

In June 2020, a group of Marines and civilians from various Marine Corps organizations, including PMO and Marine Helicopter Squadron One, converged upon a firing range aboard Marine Corps Base Quantico to learn and qualify with the M18 during the Instructor and Key Personnel Training.

After the two-hour event, Marines and subject matter experts spoke about the benefits of the system. Sgt. Journey Granados, a weapons trainer with MCB Quantico’s PMO, said the M18 is much easier to grip and shoot than other Marine Corps pistols.

“I feel more comfortable holding the M18 than I do holding the M9, largely because of the interchangeable grip,” said Granados. “This pistol is definitely easier to shoot, is a lot more accurate and should improve Marines’ qualification score.”

The requirement for Marines to qualify with a pistol will not change. Those required to qualify annually will still do so, said Nelson. Combat Marksmanship Trainers will qualify with

the M18 during New Equipment Training, and these individuals are responsible for qualifying other Marines.

“The only thing changing in the qualification course now is the verbiage in regard to single action/double action and the decocking,” said Nelson. “WTBN will hold the marksmanship symposium later this year, and they will review data to decide if the course as a whole will need to be changed.”

Maj. Mike Brisker, weapons product manager in MCSC’s Program Manager for Infantry Weapons, expressed excitement for the M18 because of its capabilities and its potential in helping Marines carry out their missions.

“This is the first service-wide replacement of the pistol since the M9 in the 1980s,” said Brisker. “The M18 is important in terms of modernization and lethality.”

Fielding the M18 is part of a larger effort to modernize and increase the lethality of Marines. The addition of the M18 to the Marine Corps inventory will be an exciting experience for many Marines, said Nelson.

“This is the first new service pistol in more than 30 years, so it’s going to be a very emotional transition for Marines,” said Nelson. “Fielding the M18 is a big step for the Marine Corps.”