Marines Stage on Expeditionary Mobile Base Ship USS Puller for Real-World Operation

ARLINGTON, Va. — A Marine Air-Ground Task Force-Crisis Response (MAGTF-CR) has used a Navy expeditionary mobile base ship (ESB) for a quick-reaction movement in the Persian Gulf, the task force commander said.

Speaking June 8 to the Potomac Institute, Col. Christopher Gideons, commander of SPMAGTF-CR-Central Command from August 2017 to April, said that elements of the task force were called upon to stage to the United Arab Emirates in preparation for a maritime intercept operation (MIO) in the region.

After arrival, the task elements staged to the USS Lewis B. Puller, a newly commissioned ESB assigned to the U.S. Fifth Fleet that supports a variety of forces including mine countermeasures forces, special operations forces, patrol boats and other units.

Gideons said MV-22B Osprey tiltrotor transport aircraft were staged to the flight deck of Puller along with an infantry contingent of about 200 Marines. The MIO of an unspecified nature was planned and rehearsed, he said, but ultimately the force was told to stand down when the MIO was canceled by higher authority.

“The team did a great job,” Gideons said.

He praised the capabilities of the ESB, with its large flight deck, spacious hangar deck and rotorcraft refueling capability.

One challenge of the operation was getting needed gear on the ship and sustaining the force, he noted.

The use of an alternate platform – the ESB – in this case was necessitated by the lack of an amphibious ready group (ARG) with an embarked Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), as pointed out during the presentation by retired Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Alfred M. Gray Jr., who also highlighted the shortage of amphibious warfare ships that necessitates the existence of SPMAGTFs.

There was a 100-day gap in the presence of an ARG/MEU when Gideons' SPMAGTF was in theater, Gideons said.

The SPMAGTF also operated from the French Navy helicopter carrier FS Tonnere during the deployment.

The SPMAGTFs were created in 2014 in response to the 2012 attack on the U.S. government facilities in Benghazi, Libya, in which four Americans were killed in a siege with no ARG/MEU available in the Mediterranean Sea to rescue them.