Speakers at Modern Day Marine Stress Commandant's Directives



Lt. Gen. Eric M. Smith, deputy commandant for combat development and integration, speaks during the opening ceremony for the 2019 Modern Day Marine expo at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia, on Sept. 17. U.S. Marine Corps/Lance Cpl. Yuritzy Gomez

QUANTICO, Va. – The Marines' annual appeal to industry is focusing heavily this year on capabilities that would allow distributed Marine Corps forces to not just survive but persist within the deadly areas created by the kinds of high-technology weapons that a peer competitor – such as China – can create.

The priorities at the Modern Day Marine exposition were unmanned systems, man-machine teaming, long-range precision fires, more secure and alternative forms of communications to counter the adversaries' demonstrated abilities to intercept, jam and distort traditional means, and systems that better integrate with the U.S. Navy – all directives from Commandant Gen. David H. Berger.

> *"We're focused on a naval campaign. How does the Marine Corps support naval operations."*
>
> *Col. Tim Barrick, director of wargaming, Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory*

And it all must be lighter, faster and affordable, Lt. Gen. Eric Smith, the Corps' top future capabilities officer, stressed.

"We're looking for autonomy, man-unmanned teaming, we need to get lighter. … I'm willing to take risks," Smith, commanding general of Marine Combat Development Command, told industry representatives on Sept. 17 at the opening of Modern Day Marine.

Smith repeated the commandant's guidance that new systems should be "good, not exquisite. … It's not an existential threat to use good enough for a few years until the budget improves." But the ultimate need is the ability "to persist in the weapons-engagement zone. Not survive, persist," he said.

Col. Brian Magnuson, Office of Naval Research Science and Technology military deputy, joined leaders from the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory for a "Marine Corps Futures" panel during the Modern Day Marine expo. U.S. Navy/John F. Williams

Panels of the senior officers and civilian officials in the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory (MCWL) and the Combat Development and Integration division under Smith's command repeated those views as they discussed their programs. And all of them emphasized the focus on integrating with the Navy in ways that would allow the Corps to help naval task forces get through the anti-access, area-denial capabilities that China – and to a lesser extent Russia and Iran – can create with long-range missiles,

mines and other
weapons.

Col. Tim Barrick, director of wargaming at MCWL, said Berger's guidance to the Corps emphasized the need for additional wargaming to shape the missions and capabilities they would need to meet the emerging great power competition. To meet that demand, the Marines are planning to create a wargaming center that would go from 22 to more than 200 personnel and serve not just the Marines but the joint forces in the Washington, D.C., region.

Barrick said they were stressing three concepts: distributed operations; littoral operations in a contested environment; and expeditionary advanced based operations. "We're focused on a naval campaign. How does the Marine Corps support naval operations," he added.

Many briefers said the level of Marine integration and cooperation with the Navy leadership and senior staffs was the highest they had ever seen. The greatest deficiencies cited by the briefers was a lack of long-range precision fires in the ground forces, the need for command, control and communications systems that are mobile enough to move with small distributed combat units but work in the highly contested information environment, and logistics methods and systems that can sustain those distributed units within the deadly "weapons-engagement zone."

Unmanned and robotic systems were proposed as possible solutions to some of those capabilities gaps.