Navy, Marines Demonstrate ‘Blue-Green’ Future of Expeditionary Logistics at Pacific Blitz 2019

Sailors assigned to Coastal Riverine Squadron 11 conduct navigational check rides on Sea Ark patrol boats during Pacific Blitz 2019 at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California. U.S. Navy/Chief Mass Communication Specialist William S. Parker

Some 10,000 Marines and Sailors stretched their logistical muscles to support and supply sea-based operations during a major exercise to prepare naval expeditionary forces for enemy threats and a potential future fight across an island-dotted battlespace.

During Pacific Blitz 2019, they built expeditionary bases, cleared and repaired an airfield and seaport, resupplied units on land and warships at sea, and created medical care, refueling and rearming positions. The exercise, held March 12 through March 31 in Southern California, combined two regular training events – maritime prepositioning exercise Pacific Horizon and amphibious integration exercise Dawn Blitz.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson (center) and Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Robert B. Neller (right) speak to Marines during Pacific Blitz 2019. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Sarah Villegas

The force-level training event for I Marine Expeditionary

Force and the Navy's 3rd Fleet, supported by Naval Expeditionary Combatant Command (NECC), focused on distributed maritime operations with emphasis on expeditionary logistics and sea control. That includes operational capabilities to refuel, resupply, repair, and rearm expeditionary forces dispersed at sea and ashore — and likely against capable, peer-like enemy forces. Those missions are critical to the Marine Corps and Navy concepts of Distributed Maritime Operations (DMO), Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment (LOCE) and Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO).

https://youtu.be/4kKxor1DES4

The campaign-level exercise required fleet and force battle staffs to integrate and "action officers work through the pains of: how do you actually do this, how do you coordinate, do our systems talk well to each other and how do we get better at those pieces," said Lt. Cmdr. John Ruggiero, a lead planner at NECC headquarters in Virginia Beach, Virginia, exercise liaison to 3rd Fleet and I MEF. Both sides want "to ensure that we continue to build on what we've learned, to make sure we document what we've learned and keep that going." Lessons learned will wrap into follow-on exercises such as Large-Scale Exercise 2020, Ruggiero said.

NECC provided something of a bridge supporting fleet and force missions in the battlespace, where expeditionary advanced bases, advanced

naval bases, sea bases, airfields and ports provided logistical hubs to support
and sustain operational forces.


U.S. Marine Corps Pfc. Noe Quintanillo, an embarkations clerk, secures a truck on a landing craft during Pacific Blitz 2019.
Cpl. Jacob Farbo/I Marine Expeditionary Force

"We are constantly looking for opportunities like Pacific
Blitz where we can demonstrate this capability," said Cmdr. Brian Cummings,
NECC explosive ordnance disposal planner and exercise liaison to 3rd Fleet and
I MEF. "When people think Navy, they think airplanes, they think carriers, they
think DDGs and they think submarines – but they're not necessarily thinking
expeditionary teams of four to 10 people that are thinking of putting missiles
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Sailors worked with 1st Marine Logistics Group to
construct advanced naval bases and facilities at simulated "islands" in the
scenario-based exercise. In a first, they removed and unpacked an Expeditionary
Medical Facility from the roll-on/roll-off cargo ship USNS Sgt. William R.
Button (T-AK-3012), set it up at an expeditionary base at Camp Pendleton,
California, and later broke it down, packed it up and reloaded it onto Button.

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Navy Seabees at five sites built several berthing areas, did concrete slab and masonry work, repaired a damaged airfield, repaired and rebuilt a 3.5-mile gravel road and, in a proof-of-concept, built a 90,000-square-foot heavy equipment storage area with a 24-foot wide, 8-foot tall berm.

"The best part of this exercise was all these projects were real-world projects, with the exception of the berm … being utilized by their customers," said Builder 1st Class Jacob Kusay of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 5.

U.S. Marines and Sailors offload supplies during the two-week Pacific Blitz exercise. Lance Cpl. Betzabeth Galvan/1st Marine Logistics Group

But it wasn't just about construction. The road and berm projects were part of the realistic battle scenarios, Kusay said, so "we set up our own 360-degree security, maintained their own security watch 24/7 until the project was completed."

More than 100 Marines with Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 16 packed their mobile facilities onto aviation logistics ship SS Curtiss (T-AVB-4) at Port Hueneme, California, and got underway to do aircraft maintenance at sea, a new experience for maintainers accustomed to working in hangars and airfields.

> *#USNavy #Seabees conducted training at @CampPendletonCA during exercise Pacific Blitz 2019. #PacBlitz19 provides an opportunity for Navy Expeditionary forces to ensure they are capable, interoperable and deployable on short notice to provide #NavyReadiness wherever needed. pic.twitter.com/pSl7kyd9US*
>
> *— U.S. Navy (@USNavy) March 13, 2019*

"That's kind of why we do this, to operate outside our comfort zone to expand our capabilities," said Capt. Mark Stone, supply officer with 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing's aviation logistics department. Stone helped coordinate movements by boats and MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotors and CH-53E Super Stallion heavy-lift helicopters to and from the Curtiss.

The Marine Corps relies on Curtiss and SS Wright (T-AVB-3) on the East Coast to provide at-sea intermediate-level maintenance of rotary and fixed-wing aircraft. Marines repaired, tested or maintained aircraft parts brought to the ship. Those they couldn't fix were sent to the depot for overhaul. Marines "repaired a significant amount of components for us to get back to MALS-16 to support the flight line," Stone said. By the end of the exercise, Marines on the ship had fixed or repaired 134 components, Maj. James Moore, MALS-16 operations officer, said in an email.

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Chief Aviation Ordnanceman Raymond Gibree

Pacific Blitz provided a rare, hands-on training in an expeditionary ordnance reload operation typically handled by Navy Munitions Command teams. It was the first time Navy Cargo Handling Battalion 1 did the rapid resupply mission, a new capability the Navy is weighing expanding since the future distributed battlespace may require other units to rapidly resupply and reload warships.

Sailors used a forklift and crane to load an SM-2 missile into a vertical launch system tube on guided-missile destroyer USS Michael Murphy (DDG-112) March 13 at Seal Beach Naval Weapons Station, California.

Seabees offload an AC generator unit from the back of a cargo truck onto a forklift. U.S. Navy/Petty Officer 3rd Class Jack Aistrup

“It gave us a great overview, start to finish, of how would we do this down range as far as transportation, getting equipment supplies and ordnance from point A to point B,” said Chief Aviation Ordnanceman Raymond Gibree, senior adviser with the reload team.

“We garnered a tremendous amount of experience with the reps and sets we got, under the oversight of NMC,” Gibree said. “We are expected to do this mission in many different locations, under many different circumstances and under permissive, hostile and uncertain areas.”

The scenario

included transporting the team on two Navy ships and utility landing craft to reach Michael Murphy. It helped “make sure we can provide that capability to the fleet in more locations, more responsive to their requirements,” Ruggiero said, “wherever they happen to be.”