

15TH MEU DETAILED HISTORY

In April 1983, the Commandant of the Marine Corps approved the original Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) Headquarters concept, providing for the sourcing of two Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU) headquarters from each Marine Amphibious Brigade headquarters. The Commandant directed the establishment of two additional MAU headquarters in November 1985. As a result, the Headquarters, 15th Marine Amphibious Unit was activated July 1, 1987 at Camp Pendleton.

The Commandant directed the replacement of the title "Headquarters" with "Command Element" in the titles of the MAGTFs in August 1987. The 15th MAU's designation was further changed in February 1988 to the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit. Both changes were made to more accurately reflect the operational and expeditionary nature of the MAGTF. Before World War II, and in the period between the war and the Vietnam Conflict, Marine units dispatched for overseas service were generally designated as "expeditionary brigades."

Since its activation in July 1987, the 15th MEU has trained to meet its mission in the rotation with the 11th and 13th MEUs in order to provide a continuous presence in the Western Pacific, Indian Ocean, and Persian Gulf as well as a ready MAGTF in the continental United States.

In October 1989, the MEU assisted in relief efforts following the San Francisco earthquake, performing their assigned missions and also taking on several volunteer projects to help the victims of the disaster.

Marines of the 15th MEU relieved the 1st Battalion, 24th Marines (1/24), to continue the evacuation of the Republic of the Philippines in August 1991 after the eruption of Mount Pinatubo six weeks earlier. Aid lasted over a month as the Marines distributed food and medical supplies, evacuated stranded villagers and provided security to rescue personnel.

The MEU spearheaded Operation Restore Hope on December 9, 1992, to provide humanitarian assistance to the civil war-torn and famine-stricken country of Somalia. After a predawn landing, the Marines secured the capital city of Mogadishu, the international airport and maritime shipping port facilities, as well as the American Embassy, quickly moving into other inland areas to protect food distribution convoys and patrol the streets to restore order. The MEU pushed into and secured the inland cities of Baidoa and Balidogle and the coastal town of Kismayo in order to establish relief efforts and maintain security. Battalion Landing Team's operations covered over 150 miles (240 km).

During its deployment in 1994, the MEU provided a detachment of CH-53Es to assist in the Rwanda Relief Effort. The detachment, based in Entebbe, Uganda, provided the only heavy lift capability to the joint task force commander. A few weeks later the MEU assisted in the relocation of the United States Liaison Office from Mogadishu, Somalia, to Nairobi, Kenya.

In October 1994, the MEU was called on again to provide a quick reaction force to counter any possible Iraqi aggression against Kuwait. Within 48 hours, the MEU sent Marines ashore in Kuwait City to demonstrate U.S. resolve in maintaining peace and security in the area.



In January 1996, July 1997, and October 1998, AV-8B Harriers from the 15th MEU (SOC) participated in Operation Southern Watch, patrolling the No-fly zone over southern Iraq, maintaining continuous surveillance of the Kuwait-Iraq border, and to ensure the Iraqi military did not violate any United Nations resolutions passed since the Gulf War.

During its 2000 deployment, the 15th MEU (SOC) participated in Australian-led Operation Stabilise, providing desperately needed assistance to the people of East Timor, and again patrolled the skies over Southern Iraq in support of Operation Southern Watch.

Marines of the Forward Command Element of the 15th MEU (SOC) were in East Timor readying for the arrival of the ARG to conduct Humanitarian Operations, while the ARG was in Darwin, Australia, during the attacks. Following the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the 15th MEU (SOC) continued their plans of humanitarian operations to assist the war-torn country of East Timor, before sailing to the North Arabian Sea in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. October 7, 2001, the 15th MEU participated in the United States' new "War on Terrorism," sending Marines and Sailors into Northern Pakistan to establish a forward operating air base and logistical hub. These Marines provided security to U.S. Air Force personnel who arrived on location shortly after the 15th MEU Marines of Battalion Landing Team 1/1 established security.

November 25, 2001, the Marines and Sailors of the 15th MEU (SOC) conducted an amphibious assault over 400 miles (640 km) into the land-locked country of Afghanistan. The Marines and Sailors set new standards for Marine Corps amphibious doctrine. Landing at a remote airbase, 90 miles (140 km) southwest of Kandahar, the Marines established Camp Rhino, America's first Forward Operating Base while maintaining the first significant conventional ground presence in Afghanistan. The Marines and coalition forces later moved north to Kandahar International Airport securing a new forward operating base. With the move, the Marines and coalition forces were able to continue with new missions and build a prison camp that housed numerous Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters.

January 6, 2003, this time onboard USS Tarawa Amphibious Ready Group, the 15th MEU (SOC) departed once again for another deployment. In mid-February, elements of the MEU off-loaded and established a training camp in Northern Kuwait while other members of the MAGTF- primarily the helicopter squadron- remained onboard the Tarawa ARG in the Persian Gulf.



During February and March 2003, tactical control (TACON) of the MEU was assigned to the United Kingdom's 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines for Operation Iraqi Freedom. March 21, 2003, Marines from the 15th MEU crossed the border into Southern Iraq and secured the ports of Umm Qasr and Az Zubayr in order to destroy Iraqi resistance and enable follow-on humanitarian assistance to begin.

In late-March 2003, the MEU again became part of the I Marine Expeditionary Force and moved to An Nasiriyah, Iraq, to relieve the Marines of Task Force Tarawa. In An Nasiriyah, the 15th MEU secured the remaining sectors of the city, conducted a supporting attack during the rescue of American prisoner of war Jessica Lynch and continued to establish security throughout the greater An Nasiriyah area. The MEU provided humanitarian assistance to the local population that included purifying drinking water, and doctors and corpsmen assisted medical care. The MEU began helping establish the local government to include police and other local services in addition to continuing to conduct airborne surveillance and direct-action raids on the ground to seek out and capture any Ba'ath Party or Fedayeen resistance.

In January 2005, the 15th MEU participated in Operation Unified Assistance by providing disaster relief to survivors of a massive tsunami in Sumatra, Indonesia and southern Sri Lanka. Immediately after wrapping up those operations, the 15th MEU proceeded to Baghdad, Iraq to provide security and stability in a rural area of the city.

During that period, the 15th MEU conducted security checkpoints, completed numerous raids, captured key high-value targets and gained the trust of the Iraqi citizens by providing medical and dental care at local schools.

In September 2006, the 15th MEU deployed once again from Camp Pendleton, Calif., on a routine deployment to the Western Pacific region, stopping in India and Maldives for bilateral training. These operations were crucial to enhancing military-to-military relations and regional cooperation.

In November of that year, the 15th MEU was committed into Iraq to support area commanders in the Al Anbar Province, known as a hotbed of anti-Iraq Forces. Spread throughout the region from Korean Village to Ramadi and the Haditha triad, Marines and Sailors of the 15th MEU provided much needed security to the area enabling the establishment of Iraqi law enforcement, economic progress and the creation of local Iraqi government.

Due in part to their successes, the needs of the area commanders and being part of MNF-I "surge" to defeat insurgent forces across the country, the Marines and Sailors of the 15th MEU were extended twice, turning what was supposed to be a six month deployment into almost nine months.

In April 2007, the 15th MEU (SOC) left Iraq and returned home in May 2007. During its post deployment, the 15th MEU conducted field training at Fort Hunter-Liggett and the Mountain Warfare Training Center, Bridgeport.



After completing a rigorous six month work-up cycle, the 15th MEU was ready to once again set sail into the Pacific. Leaving in May 2008, its voyage took the Marines and Sailors to Singapore, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sydney.

15th MEU conducted valuable bilateral training with the nation of Kuwait participating in a large scale training exercise known as "Eager Mace". Additionally, 15th MEU travelled to Jordan to participate in another training exercise known as "Infinite Moonlight".

Furthermore, the 15th MEU was partly responsible for thwarting an incident at sea involving pirates. A cargo ship known as the Gem of Kilakarai came under rocket and small arms attack from pirates. Receiving their distress call, the 15th MEU immediately launched helicopters to intercept and deter the pirates. Upon arrival of the Marines, the pirates disengaged their attack and fled the area.

The 15th MEU returned from deployment in November 2008.

In February 2009, the 15th MEU Command Element participated in exercise "Iron Fist", a bilateral training exercise with elements of the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force. The exercise helped hone the skills of both nations and focused on tactics such as ship-to-shore and defensive operations, live fire and maneuvering, and Military Operations in Urban Terrain training.

In September 2009, elements of the 15th MEU Command Element traveled to Souda Bay, Crete, to participate in exercise "Maritime Prepositioning Force Offload 2009." During this one month exercise in Greece, the 15th MEU coordinated the unloading and maintenance of Maritime Prepositioning Force (MPF) equipment, which stays afloat as a ready reserve for any upcoming conflicts.

After completing a rigorous six month work-up cycle, the 15th MEU set sail for its Western Pacific deployment in May 2010, during which time the 15th MEU conducted numerous operations and exercises in dozens of countries.

In June 2010, the 15th MEU conducted exercise CROCODILO in Timor Leste and MAREX in Indonesia. As the second MEU to ever visit Timor Leste, the 15th MEU engaged in jungle training, live fire exercises and helped refurbish schools in the area. The 15th MEU also set up medical sites to help aid the local populace.

During MAREX, elements of the 15th MEU conducted training with the Indonesian Armed Forces and helped strengthen the U.S.-Indonesia working relationship.

Later in July, the 15th MEU conducted exercise, "BENEVOLENT PHOENIX" in Sri Lanka and BUNGALOW BREEZE in Maldives. Both exercises helped strengthen US rapport with Sri Lanka and Maldives.

In late July, elements of the 15th MEU participated in exercise EAGER MACE 10-02 with the Kuwaiti Armed Forces. During the exercise, knowledge in military training and cultural experiences were shared between the two countries building strong and lasting bonds.

In early August, torrential rains ravaged Pakistan and caused major flooding throughout the country. The 15th MEU was sent to assist and to conduct Humanitarian and Disaster Relief operations in Pakistan until mid November.



While operations were conducted in Pakistan, the 15th MEU also provided air support to Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. The 15th MEU Harriers conducted over 300 close air support sorties from August until October.

September 8, 2010, Somali pirates hijacked the German Motor Vessel Magellan Star and took the crew hostage. The 15th MEU's Force Recon Platoon executed the first opposed VBSS mission in Marine Corps history in 100 years aboard a captured vessel, and rescued the crew without one shot being fired.

During the rest of the month of September, elements of the 15th MEU conducted a bilateral training exercise with the Jordanian Army called "DESERT FOX." Throughout this exercise Marines and soldiers from Jordan shared ideas and cultural experiences that will only serve to spread good will back and forth across the globe.

After DESERT FOX, the 15th MEU also conducted exercise ECHO MOUNTAIN with Yemen forces and exercise ROCK with the Saudi Maritime Forces.

In the final weeks of September, the 15th MEU rescued 62 persons at sea and transported them safely to Kenya. The persons stayed aboard ship for almost a month where they were given medical care, food and water.

The 15th MEU returned from deployment in December of 2010.

September 2011 brought the 15th MEU CE and other Marines from I MEF to Southern India for Exercise Shatrueet 2011. The training enhanced interoperability of Indian and U.S. Marine forces in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations. Additionally, it promoted partnership, readiness and cooperation between the two militaries.

In January of 2012, the 15th MEU participated in the seventh iteration of Exercise Iron Fist. Exercise Iron Fist 2012 was a bilateral training exercise that gave the 15th MEU a chance to demonstrate its amphibious capabilities to the Japanese. The training involved live-fire training, a staff planning exercise, helicopter dunker training, helicopter casting and boat training, and ended with an at-sea portion where the service members conducted a ship-to-shore operation.

February 20, 2012, the 15th MEU gained operational control of its major subordinate elements for WESTPAC 12-2. The elements are: Battalion Landing Team 3/5, Combat Logistics Battalion 15, and Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 364.

The 15th MEU conducted an arduous training cycle for its deployment scheduled and departed for WESTPAC 12-2 September 16. The MEU participated in exercise CORCODILO in East Timor and exercise EAGER MACE 13 in the North Arabian Gulf when the Marines celebrated the kick-off of the exercise and the Marine Corps' Birthday November 10, 2012. MEU Marines also conducted contingency operations and embassy reinforcement in support of Africa Combatant Command. Also in November 2012, part of the MEU was positioned for Exercise Iron Magic 13, bilateral theater security operations, in the United Arab Emirates. Concurrently, an element of Marines was serving as a reaction force to provide security in Djibouti, Africa, due to an inflammatory situation.

Elements of the MEU executed RED REEF 5 in Saudi Arabia during the first two weeks of the new year, and toward the end of January 2013, the MEU conducted Maritime Interdiction Operations near the coast of Oman providing security for a vessel of interest until it arrived in port, as well as supporting a high-valued individual interdiction mission.

From January 20 through February 3 Marines from the Maritime Raid Force participated in exercise LEADING EDGE with Proliferation Security Initiative members, which is a global effort that aims to stop trafficking of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), their delivery systems, and related materials.

Following LEADING EDGE, a group supported the International Defense Industry Exposition in the United Arab Emirates with a helicopter on display readditional elements training in Djibouti, Africa, through March.

In April the entire MEU reagggregated and began its transit home, returning May 13 and decompositing June 13, 2013. Shortly after decomposit there was a change of command June 27 and through the rest of the summer it was business as "usual" where the Marines conducted annual training and began planning for AQUA Terra 14, a bi-annual multinational exercise conducted by American, British, Canadian, Australian and New Zealander forces.

From there the MEU planned and coordinated IRON FIRST 14, another biannual exercise conducted with the Japanese Ground Self Defense Force, which was subsequently executed January 19 through February 24, 2014.

AQUA TERRA 14 was conducted May 5-22, and amphibious planners assisted in the coordination of U.S. Pacific Fleet Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training 14-MALAYSIA from June 11-21, 2014.

MEU personnel prepared for PANAMAX 14 in July 2014 and executed the exercise, which involved 17 South American countries focusing on the security of the Panama Canal, August 4-15.

Though not yet composited, the MEU began redeployment training in September and officially composited October 6. During their Composite Unit Training Exercise in April the MEU also participated in AQUA QUEST, an interoperability training event support Special Forces operations.

From May 17-21, the MEU conducted sustainment training to familiarize the Marines with operating in an unfamiliar jungle environment. The Marines concurrently support CULEBRA KOA-15, conducting expeditionary amphibious operations and sea-basing in support of sustainment and amphibious assault. The evolution included 24 Pacific Nations and highlighted amphibious partnerships and strategic relationships.

May 12, 2015, the MEU set off for its WESTPAC 15-1 deployment, and almost immediately the MEU provided personnel for a Subject Matter Expert Exchange, LAMADA PISTON, in Puerto Princesa, Philippines, through May 29.

July 2015 proved to be a continuation of the immediate high operational tempo, and the MEU staffed a Female Engagement Team in Qatar. Also, from July 18-28, elements of the MEU supported Operation Jukebox Kindle, supporting the president's visit to Kenya and Ethiopia.

Standard sustainment training continued and preparations began for the Malaysia-U.S. Exercise. Training and assist missions with various countries ran through September 2015, and Military Information Support Operations teams were sent to support Operation Inherent Resolve in mid September as well at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq.

The MEU chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear teams were ashore in Kuwait through October 10, 2015, conducting joint training with the Army's 166th Chemical Company. The MEU also continued to conduct Subject Matter Expert Exchanges with Qatar, Oman and Kuwait. The MISO team supported Joint Special Operations Task Force in the Bahrain Expedition with the Bahrain Joint Counter-terrorism Center.

Planning and preparation for Rim of the Pacific 2016, Cooperation and Readiness Afloat Training 15 and MALUS-15 continued all while AV-8 flights were conducted almost daily in support of IOR in Iraq. The MEU's final air mission over Iraq was flown October 17.

From there the MEU reached the western Pacific it participated in CARAT-15 with the Brunei Armed Forces and MALUS-15 with Malaysian Forces conducting partnered jungle training and cultural exchanges in November. Concurrent to these exercises the MEU supported the President's visit to Manila, Philippines, for the Asia-Pacific Conference 15 and conducting Pacific Presence Operations.

At the end of 2015 the MEU wrapped up its deployment and returned December 13. For the next seven months the MEU decomposited and focused on annual training until RIMPAC 2016 kicked off in July of 2016. Concurrently with RIMPAC, the MEU partnered with the Marine Corps War Fighting Lab for its Marine Air Ground Task Force Integrated Exercise 2016.

After the MEU completed final precomposite training at the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center in Bridgeport, California, and is currently prepping for WESTPAC 16.2.

