

**STATEMENT OF**  
**BRIGADIER GENERAL DOUGLAS STONE**  
**COMMANDING OFFICER, MARINE CORPS AIR GROUND COMBAT**  
**CENTER**  
**UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**

**BEFORE THE**  
**COMMISSION ON THE NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE**  
**CONCERNING**  
**RESERVE FORCES PRE-DEPLOYMENT TRAINING READINESS**  
**ON**

**September 20, 2006**

## **Introduction**

Chairman Punaro, distinguished members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to report to you on reserve pre-deployment training aboard the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC), 29 Palms, California, which is home to the Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command (MAGTFTC). During this time of war, your reserve Marines are performing well due to their courage, dedication, and commitment and our Nation's ability to continue to properly train them. MAGTFTC is critical to the latter. The reserve Marine units that train aboard MAGTFTC receive the same training and are held to the same standards as their active duty counterparts. Furthermore, as discussed more fully below, the reserve Marine units generally perform just as well in their training as their active duty counterparts.

## **MAGTFTC**

In addition to 29 Palms, two other training centers fall under MAGTFTC, which are the Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron -1 (MAWTS-1), Yuma, Arizona; and the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center (MCMWTC), Pickel Meadows, California. While each base trains reservists, currently reserve pre-deployment training only occurs at MCAGCC 29 Palms.

MCAGCC 29 Palms is the largest live-fire and maneuver facility in the United States; it consists of 932 square miles of impact area in which foot mobile and mechanized forces operate in a live-fire training environment. Prior to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, each year one third of the Marine Operating Force units received intense live-fire training through our Combined Arms Exercise (CAX) program at a rate of ten CAX programs per year, of which the

Marine Forces Reserve accounted for two. The advent of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) required not only a near doubling of units trained annually at 29 Palms, but also a change in the training program. The CAX program was first revised (RCAX) after the advent of OIF, to incorporate training techniques and procedures specific to OIF (e.g., stability and support operations). Following a comprehensive pre-deployment training evaluation, the exercise was revised again in October 2005 resulting in the current MOJAVE VIPER pre-deployment training exercise.

The culminating pre-deployment training event for all deploying units at 29 Palms is conducted through the MOJAVE VIPER exercise administered by the Tactical Training Exercise Control Group (TTECG). MOJAVE VIPER is a 30-day exercise designed to prepare Ground Combat and Logistics Combat Element Marines and Sailors for OIF deployments. Throughout all phases, units are exposed to the intricacies and skill sets needed to succeed in an irregular warfare environment. The exercise includes the following three major training events: (1) complex platoon-, company-, and battalion-level combined arms live-fire training; (2) urban warfare training focusing on collective skills and tactics, techniques, and procedures for vehicle check points, urban assault, cordon and search, and tank, infantry, and mechanized vehicle integration; and (3) three-day force-on-force, scripted free-play mission rehearsal exercise testing the skills needed to succeed in OIF.

Since its inception in October 2005, 20 units have participated in exercise MOJAVE VIPER; these units include four reserve battalions (two Provisional Military Police battalions and two Infantry Battalions) and 16 active duty battalions. A precise comparison among the various units that participate in MOJAVE VIPER is difficult; no two units are the same, and some train toward specific missions (e.g., detention center security). Also, differences in

exercise design between active duty and reserve units are based on the unit's Mission Essential Task List (METL) and the amount of training a unit was able to complete at home station.

Home station training includes what is referred to as Block I and Block II of the pre-deployment training requirement, which consists of a total of four training blocks. Block I training includes such basic, individual skills such as first aid, map reading, and individual weapons training. Block II training includes more OIF-focused individual skills, such as IED Defeat, detainee operations, fixed site security, motorized operations, cultural orientation, and law of war. Collective METLs training (e.g., convoy operations, live-fire exercises) and integrated combined arms training are considered Block III and Block IV unit training, respectively. Blocks III and IV are conducted at service-level training events, such as MOJAVE VIPER.

All MOJAVE VIPER exercises are developed around combined arms core competencies and mission rehearsal exercises. The level of instruction is adjusted based on the exercise forces' home station training, and the degree of teaching, coaching, mentoring is always tailored to demonstrated performance regardless of component. Generally, reserve units receive slightly more "teach, coach, mentor" assistance during preparatory training because of the paucity of preparation time afforded to some reserve units due to short activation notices. Generally, reserve units that receive both early activation notice and early mobilization relative to their scheduled deployment date have more time to complete home station training and therefore require less "teach, coach, mentor" assistance than those mobilized on a shorter schedule.

As mentioned above, each reserve unit to complete MOJAVE VIPER is unique; however, TTECG has discerned certain trends. In general, reserve units have performed well across all war fighting functions. In particular, we have noted the following positive trends among reserve

units: (1) small unit cohesiveness and basic military skills proficiency at the fire team, squad and platoon level; (2) high level of enthusiasm, motivation, and quick learning curve at every level; (3) mature, balanced approach to training and problem solving; and (4) diverse individual skill sets to draw from due to civilian careers. We have noted the following areas requiring more focus among the reserve units: (1) staff action and coordination within the Combat Operations Center and occasionally down to and among the companies; (2) general level of Staff Non-Commissioned Officers' proficiency in war fighting skills, which is slightly lower than their active duty counterparts; and (3) proficiency integrating technical processes and new technologies (e.g., up-armored HMMWVs, Combat Operations Center, Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS)) into the scheme of maneuver. Nonetheless, all reserves units that complete MOJAVE VIPER are qualified and meet Marine Corps standards for deployment.

### **MAWTS-1**

Marine Aviation Combat Element Pre-Deployment Training is conducted semi-annually at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma in exercise DESERT TALON. This exercise, conducted by MAWTS-1, is two weeks long and occurs approximately two months prior to unit deployments. Generally, DESERT TALON seeks to train Marine aircrew, Marine Wing Support and Communication personnel as well as division air officers and Forward Air Controllers. The exercise begins with four days of academics to review current operations and emerging, successful Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs). The exercise also addresses the conduct of Forward Arming and Refueling Point operations; convoy and convoy escort operations; raid planning and execution; assault support operations; and risk management in a combat theater.

Following the academic phase, participating units execute seven to ten days of flight operations, during which the training unit executes the missions addressed in the academic phase. The first half of the flight phase focuses generally on unit-specific TTPs, while the second half focuses on creating a realistic environment in which units are dynamically tasked, via the Marine Air Command and Control System, to execute missions on short notice. At the conclusion of DESERT TALON, the unit is generally considered Block IV complete and deployable.

Reserve Marine aviation units HMLA-775, HMM-764, HMM-774 and VMGR-452 were participants in the first four DESERT TALON exercises, as all were activated for two years and supported two OIF rotations. Our last Marine reserve participation occurred in December 2004. Barring a change to the laws governing reserve unit activation, it is not expected that Marine reserve units will participate in DESERT TALON for at least three more years. A small number of reserve forward air controllers have been trained at DESERT TALON subsequent to December 2004; and additionally, an Air National Guard H-60 Battalion from Virginia that was deploying to the Marine Multi-National Forces-West area of responsibility in Iraq participated in DESERT TALON in December 2005.

### **MCMWTC**

The Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center (MCMWTC) is a remote mountain post located in Sierra Nevada Mountains in Northern California. The MCMWTC curriculum consists of Marine Corps' formal schools for individuals and battalion training in summer and winter mountain operations. The training emphasizes development of both individual and unit mountain skills with primary emphasis on enhancing overall combat capability. Marines at the

Center are also involved in testing cold weather clothing, equipment, human performance, and rough terrain vehicles and developing doctrine and concepts to enhance the Corps' ability to fight and win in mountain and cold weather environments. Currently, no pre-deployment unit training is conducted at MCMWTC; however, MCMWTC is scheduled to train both Army and National Guard reserve units for Operation Enduring Freedom next year.

### **Conclusion**

The continued superb performance of your Marine Force Reserve units depends on our Nation's continued ability to properly train and equip them in all manners equivalent to the active duty force. Reserve units that train aboard Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center receive the same training as their active duty counter-parts and are held to the same standards. Their dedication, commitment, and enthusiasm further ensure that their performance on the battlefield will continue to remain on par with their active duty counterparts.