

## Navy and Marine Corps Capabilities Exercise (CAPEX)

By Nancy Hawley

Recently, 2,000 Sailors and Marines from Naval Expeditionary Forces and II Marine Expeditionary Force attacked and defeated enemy forces on the fictional "island of Kandoo" (really Camp Lejeune, NC). They were part of an Atlantic Capabilities Exercise, or CAPEX.

### Initial Assault

The assault begins from the sea, but don't think D-Day -- beach landings with troops offloaded directly into enemy fire are a thing of the past, thanks to heavily armored hovercraft. Helicopters and Harrier jets provide close air support as the landing craft and other amphibious assault vehicles come in to shore. Air-cushioned landing craft (<http://mitglied.lycos.de/usnavy/ships/lcac.htm>) ride on air over the water and onto the beach, easily climbing over the tall sand dunes. Each delivers up to 50 fully armed Sailors and Marines, along with light armored vehicles, to a secure landing zone.

Then the military forces prepare to move inland, where there is no infrastructure in place to support them.

### Objective: Rescue Hostages

We spectators learn that in this part of the exercise, several American scientists are being held hostage in one or more warehouse buildings on the river. The rescue mission will use [Riverine Assault Craft \(RAC\)](#), which are swift, silent and deadly, and can navigate in only 9 inches of water.

Raiders (rigid raiding craft) carry the rescue team to shore under the protection of the RAC and air support from above. After a precise and rapid assault, the American scientists are rescued and quickly moved to safety.

### Can't Cross That Bridge Till You Rebuild It

As the assault moves closer to the "capital city" of Kandoo, the enemy blows up a bridge that's the main access into the city, but this is not a problem for the Force Service Support Group -- in about an hour they can construct a bridge strong enough to hold two full-size tanks.

USMC Major General John Sattler says, "The FSSG provides the meals, dental, medical, engineering, fuel, vehicle maintenance, runways, bridges -- whatever combat support is needed, FSSG provides it. They can build a base anywhere, anytime, and do it practically overnight. The Navy and Marine Corps teams live together, work together, and fight together. The Marine Corps support group could not operate without the Navy corpsmen, doctors, dentists, chaplains, and chaplain assistants."

### Objective: Quell Rioting

As the assault moves into the capital city, rioting is out of control. Marines don riot gear to form an impenetrable wall with specially constructed shields, and begin to push the rioters back. Sailors and Marines are ready to use pepper spray and rubber batons, and may fire pellets into the crowd to disperse the rioters. Hand-to-hand combat ensues, and rioters quickly find out that all Marines are trained in martial arts.

### Danger: Chemical Threat

The enemy has released chemical agents in the town. The [Chemical Biological Incident Response Force](#) (pronounced "C-BIRF") sets up a decontamination zone in less an hour, and provides medical stabilization and treatment both in the contaminated and decontaminated zones before the "casualties" are turned over to civilian rescue.

Lt. Col. Rickey Grabowski says, "I keep crews of Sailors and Marines on a one-hour alert 24/7/365. CBIRF has a tremendous capability to deal with a wide range of problems. Recently, we were involved with the anthrax threat in Washington, D.C., and, among other things, had to figure out how to remove 12 tons of contaminated mail from a post office."

The Department of Defense currently has two bioterrorism response units ready to deploy to anywhere in the world: the Army's Technical Escort Unit (TEU) and the Marine Corps' CBIRF. They can detect and identify chemical and biological agents, predict hazards, perform advanced life saving and triage, evacuate victims from contaminated areas, decontaminate, and provide management and security at incident sites.

### **Urban Warfare**

**Warfare in an urban setting** can be especially challenging, and requires different training. Several Marine Corps bases have built small towns to train Sailors and Marines in urban warfare. Called Military Operations in Urban Terrain, or MOUTs, these are full-sized small towns with a baseball field, church, gymnasium, school, a shopping mall, homes, and several full-size office and apartment buildings, some up to six stories tall.

### **Objective: Take the Town Back**

In this part of the exercise, enemy forces in the capital city of Kandoo are holding hostages in the school gymnasium, while armed troops on rooftops hold the town. The objective is to rescue the hostages and take control of the city.

Air and mortar forces create a diversion on one side of the city so the enemy will deploy its forces there. Then the Sailors, Marines, tanks, and light armored vehicles, with close air support, invade the other side of the city, where the enemy least expects it. This shatters the enemy's defenses. A "fast rope" insertion from a helicopter over the gymnasium rescues the hostages. After tanks and light armored vehicles enter town, the enemy surrenders.

"We do two things -- we bring quick, violent action at a time and a place where the enemy least expects it, and overwhelm them by breaking apart their military system," explains USMC Major General John Goodman, 2d Marine Division. "The Marine Corps' philosophy of maneuver warfare is to look at the strengths of our enemy and the location and terrain they are defending, and, through reconnaissance and surveillance, determine where they are weakest, and attack them at a time and a place where they least expect us."

At the end of the day, the Sailors and Marines (average age 19) who participated in the urban warfare part of the exercise (acting as both the good guys and the enemy) form into two long rows facing each other. Throughout the day, we have been encouraged to talk to the service members after every phase of the exercise. Seeing their discipline and highly specialized training left us with a feeling of pride and gratitude for these remarkable warriors.