FEATURE

Super-charged squads being developed for Corps' use

CPL. JUSTIN P. LAGO
AND SENTRY STAFF
MCB QUANTICO

MARINE CORPS BASE QUANTICO, Va. — Plans are underway at Marine Corps Combat Development Command to give the infantry squad more horsepower. High speed gear, more skill sets and increased authority are coming to infantry squads, set to make the basic rifleman the most connected element on the battlefield -- instead of the least connected.

For now, MCCDC calls the next evolution in Marine Corps warfighting Distributed Operations; however, the Corps wants Marines involved in its naming and development.

The new concept builds on past Marine Corps experiments and will add another aspect to Marine Corps warfighing. It will present increased asymmetrical lethality to an asymmetrical enemy, giving him a much bigger problem and fewer options than the enemy can give Marines.

To ensure a successful implementation of the distributed operations concept, the Marine Corps will require enhancements in training and education, equipment, command and control, intelligence, and mobility and sustainment.

Training and Education

"Faster decision-making, creativity and agile leadership are required from the tactical level up to the (Joint Task Force) headquarters," said Brig. Gen. Robert E. Schmidle, director, Expeditionary Force Development Center, MCCDC.

"Associated education, war gaming and combat simulation activities are needed to achieve the requisite professional judgment and tactical decision making skills inherent to distributed operations."

Training will be tailored to the already busy training schedule.

"The new equipment training will be refined so squad members can pick up a piece of gear and use it, much like anyone picking up a cell phone and using it," said Lt. Col. Chris Carolan of the Center for Emerging Threats and Operations, Expeditionary Force Development Center.

Some of the enhanced training packages for squads being evaluated are:

- Small unit training focused on independent tactical actions
- Information gathering and reporting
- Directing fires, fire support planning, call for fire and introduction to close air support
- Communication procedures and equipment training for Marines outside of the communications field
- Surveillance techniques
- Advanced land navigation
- Air insertion and extraction
- Associated training for new equipment

"Training details and specifics are still being worked out, and we are interested in any input Marines have on this," said Schmidle.

Equipment

"New equipment will be added to these units to enhance their ability to plan, coordinate and execute operations," said Carolan. "Currently, higher headquarters has the tools to plan and track operations with great detail. We want to push this down to the Marines who need it most, at the company and below levels."

"Various equipment is being considered." Carolan said. "Some of the gear we already have - we just need to increase the number or realign the (tables of equipment). Most of the equipment changes will be in communications, surveillance, targeting and mobility."

Carolan cited examples such as a personal data assistant with a position location indicator, global positioning system, an electronic map and a compass.

Surveillance equipment considerations include a laser ranger finder, thermal imager and digital photographic capabilities.

From the fire team to the company level and above, Schmidle said, Marine teams will employ Blue Force Tracker systems, a virtual grid GPS computer element that can pinpoint locations of U.S. forces and mobile equipment via satellite with the ability to identify troop movement and position in accordance with Army, Navy and Air Force teams.

Cpl. Matthew E. Habib

HOKKAIDO, Japan – Sergeant Parish J. Harvey, squad leader, Company L, 3/8, quickly issues orders to his Marines in order to efficiently engage the enemy. Plans are underway to make Marine NCOs more self-sufficient.

Fires

According to the concept, newly implemented strategic NCOs will be able to exploit the small size of their units to locate enemy forces without detection, and use their top-of-the-line surveillance and communication equipment to pinpoint grid coordinates and call for accurate fire.

"The plan focuses on developing a capability within the squad, tantamount to that currently found at the company or battalion level," said Carolan. "The vision is that squads will call for and control fires, from mortars to fixed wing aircraft and eventually cruise missiles. These fires will be available 24/7 and in all weather conditions."

As fires and munitions become increasingly precise, target designation accuracy must increase exponentially; so, the squads will play a large role in the increased target designation accuracy.

Command and Control

Today's fleeting targets and elusive opponents present a requirement to streamline the identification of enemy locations and decision to take action. Planners are developing a command-and-control communications network to connect commanders and squads, in order to plan for and successfully execute extremely fast-paced operations. This will enable squads to receive and send information that will create a greater awareness of the situation, thereby empowering them to take appropriate action. One form of this communications network may be an easy-to-use, PDA-type devise that can assist in calls for fire, send reports and act as a position location devise.

Intelligence

The individual squad on the ground will become the most connected element on the battlefield by giving it the situational awareness beyond what it can observe directly, and giving other units the knowledge of what it can see. This capability includes locating enemy forces, as well as access to behind-the-scenes information affecting the battlespace, and access to national systems in the continental U.S. The overall result will accelerate actionable information and allow the squad to act quickly, throwing the enemy off balance. Reconnaissance and reporting training will be pushed down to the squads to give Marines extra skill sets necessary.

Mobility and Sustainment

"Obviously mobility will be key," Carolan said. "Several options are being looked at." These options include the Interim Fast Attack Vehicle, or another such vehicle capable of being transported and employed from a V-22, Carolan explained.

Additional tactical mobility compatible with projected vertical delivery systems will be needed for ground maneuver forces conducting distributed operations.

According to the concept, sustainment will also be dependent upon innovative techniques and enhanced mobility. The distributed operations concept requires an increased ability for monitoring and delivering sustainment for forces across a larger battlespace. This issue is sill being developed, though one possibility for small unit resupply may be unmanned aerial vehicles.

Putting it into practice

Distributed operations squads may be inserted as individual squads or collectively in platoon- or company-sized configurations. Because of their size, squads will be inserted usually during hours of darkness by aviation assets. When inserted as part of larger formations, the units can separate and maneuver to their assigned operating areas, or operate from a platoon or company patrol base. "DO teams will force the enemy to move," said Schmidle. "A mobile enemy trying to avoid our strike capability is increasingly vulnerable."

The way ahead

"It is an additional capability that will allow the Marine Corps to operate effectively on today's multi-dimensional battlefield." said Schmidle. "This is not really a change in mission. Do will complement our conventional capabilities and allow us to better accomplish our tasks. It will also enable us to work better with SOF when they team with us, as we're doing in Iraq and Afghanistan."

Planners hope the changes to training and new gear will be pushed down to the squad-level sooner than may be expected. It may be possible to start experiments this year, with a DO-capable unit ready by 2006, Schmidle said.

"It is inevitable that Marines will adapt to fight the enemy and DO is another tool that offers an adjustment."

RAISE,

Continued from Page 1

While the pay increases may seem minimal, it is the largest arbitrary increase in recent memory. Most recent pay increases were applied to specific pay grades.

During Operation Desert Storm, an E-2 made $845 per month. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, a private first class will make $1,385 per month in base pay.

The complete defense appropriation process is only half completed. Although the House and Senate passed their perspective bills last week, the two committees must meet to agree on a joint spending bill for fiscal year 2005. The hearings began Monday and should be completed by July.

Information from the Defense Finance and Accounting Service Web site was used in this report.