

United states marine corps in the interwar period history essay



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Currently the complexity of the global security environment poses number of challenges to the military forces. Nations require keeping military forces to be ready for quick response in case of the full spectrum of crises now, and at the same time to be prepared for an uncertain future. Probably it will require a fundamental transformation of military forces. The future threats are changeable and unpredictable, and military forces are likely to confront a variety of challenges and tasks across the spectrum of conflict.[1]

Transformation and innovation are the complex processes and requires close interaction between intellectual, institutional, and political-economic factors of state. Most changes take place in the spheres of military though, equipment and organization in order to meet perceived future national security requirements. Because of the different security environment some changes are significant and sometimes even happening rapidly, while others are proceeding more slowly.

To assess fundamental military change it is necessary to know the character and nature of the military services as they now are, and look to what it is they may become. What are the common denominators of their character and nature, of their organization, equipment and doctrine? These are the things that must change if there is to be a transformation. It may be beneficial then, to take a look at other military transformations with a view to how the current military transformation might develop.[2]

Fundamental transformation of military forces has occurred periodically throughout history. The period between 1914 and 1945 shows the dynamic nature of military innovation and the difficulty military organizations face in

adapting to the changing global strategic environment and evolving threats. The development of the United States Marine Corps during the interwar period is one of examples how successful the service was able to change its mission fundamentally and how it became the leading organization in amphibious assault operations.[3]

The aim of this paper is to look to the external and internal factors which influenced the development of the United States Armed forces amphibious doctrine, and analyze the Marine Corps effectiveness to tackle this issue in terms of military leadership, education, and organizational experimentation and development.

OVERALL SITUATION IN THE UNITED STATES AFTER WORLD WAR I AND FACTORS INFLUENCING DEVELOPMENT OF AMPHIBIOUS DOCTRINE

Strategic situation

From 1921 to 1936, the American people, their representatives in Congress, and their President thought that the United States could and should avoid future wars with other major powers, except possibly Japan. They believed the nation could achieve this goal by maintaining a minimum of defensive military strength, avoiding entangling commitments with Old World nations, and yet using American good offices to promote international peace and the limitations of armaments.[4]

The U. S. Constitution was a prime force in shaping American strategic culture and the goals of State national security policy throughout the 1920s and 1930s were quite simple: to ensure the physical security of the

continental United States. But with the rejection of joining the League of Nations (the Treaty of Versailles) in 1919, the United States turned its back upon any involvement in international projects aimed at collective security.

[5]The main dispute issue was Article 10 of the League's Treaty, which obligated member states to protect one another from external aggression.

The postwar negotiations on naval building and Pacific security ended with three treaties that would shape American naval policy until the mid-1930s and influence the development of the postwar Marine Corps. The Five Power Treaty (1922) established Great Britain and the United States at parity in capital ship tonnage (500 000 tons each), with Japan accepting a 300 000-ton limit, an inferiority softened by a provision that signatories would not construct permanent fortifications around their naval bases in the Western Pacific. For the United States the no fortification pledge meant that neither the Philippines nor Guam could be developed as a major base. This agreement was simply recognition of domestic political realities and the hope that Japan would not develop its Micronesian islands into naval bases. The other two treaties signed in the Washington Conference justified the naval limitations, for they pledged the conferees to respect each other's Pacific holdings and preserve the territorial integrity of China.[6]

In reality, with these agreements the United States succeeded in replacing the Anglo-Japanese alliance with a four-power treaty with Britain, France, and Japan, but unfortunately limited the United States and Great Britain base building in the Pacific in return for reluctant Japanese acceptance of apparently unfavorable ratios in naval strength. At one stroke the strategic balance in the Pacific was shifted radically in favor of Japan. That country

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now possessed a deep zone of island outposts. Fortified and supported by the Japanese fleet, they would constitute a serious obstacle to the advance of the United States Fleet across the Pacific.

The four basic aims of America's pre-1941 national strategy in the Far East were to prepare the Philippines for independence, to keep the China market open to American traders, to maintain the flow of raw materials from South East Asia important to American industry, and by means short of force to deter Japanese expansion in those areas.[7]

The United States armed forces

The US armed forces in the 1920s and 1930s were obliged to function in a political environment which made it extremely difficult, if not impossible for those organizations to secure financial, industrial, and human resources which they considered necessary to attain even the minimum level of military capability to carry out their anticipated wartime missions.[8] In the early 1930's the United States was absorbed by the domestic economical difficulties of the Great Depression, which accordingly mirrored on the development of armed forces.

However, the 1920s and 1930s were periods of rapid growth and change in many areas of military technology. Despite extremely limited resources, the US armed forces were able, in general, to keep abreast of these developments and produce weapons and equipment that were qualitatively - if not quantitatively - equal to the most advanced systems being developed by the Great Powers. Radar, sonar, the B-17 bomber, the 105-mm howitzer, the Grand (M-1) rifle, and the dive bomber are but a few examples of the

types of innovative and highly effective equipment produced by the armed forces between the wars.[9]

In addition to stringent budgets, the large amounts of obsolescent, but still serviceable equipment remaining from the First World War tended to inhibit the efforts to provide modern equipment. Development and procurement of the 105-mm howitzer, for example, was far slower than it might have been because of the availability of so many French '75s' left over from the world war.[10] During the interwar period each service conducted numbers of experiments how to integrate new and old equipment for future use.

In the area of manpower, the military services were affected by the stringent economy measures. Few military units in either service could be manned at a level which would enable them to carry out realistic training or exercises over an extended period of time or maintain a high degree of practical readiness. In term of officers' professional military education, the services were much better. The army and navy had entered the 1920s with a mature system of professional military education ranging from the Military Academy at West Point and Naval Academy at Annapolis to the Army and Naval War Colleges.[11]

The United States Marine Corps after World War I

The United States Marine Corps had existed since almost the first military laws of the Continental Congress in 1775, an adjunct of the Navy providing shipboard police (disliked by the Navy's blue-jackets), boarding parties, small landing parties, some gun crews, legation and embassy guards, and increasingly in the twentieth century, police for restless underdeveloped

areas of the world where there were American citizens, investments, and imperial interests.[12]However, before World War I the USMC (United States Marine Corps) was so small and obscure military organization that most political leaders and public did not know that it was an independent service administered by the Navy Department, but not part of the navy itself.

Even following the Marines' outstanding combat service on the Western Front in World War I, leading naval commanders found it hard to imagine that individual Marines were capable of conducting heavy military operations and that officers were intelligent enough to lead large units of men. Such disdain was reflected by the Marine Corps's total dependence on the Navy for its financial resources, the impossibility of letting a senior Marine officer command significant naval resources, and the encouragement of only the worst Naval Academy graduates to accept Marine Corps commissions.[13]

By mid 1921, at a time of isolationism and retrenchment, the strength of the U. S. Marine Corps diminished to 1 087 officers and 21 903 enlisted men, a figure that was to drop even lower during the late 1920s and early 1930s. In the wake of demobilization the entire Corps was suffering from a letdown that invariably follows the return of military organization to peacetime conditions. Most of the men who had signed up for the emergency had returned to their civilian pursuits. Many wartime officers had left the service and wholesale demotions in rank had become necessary, while recruiting was slow. The status of the officers who remained was uncertain.[14]

In beginning of 1920 the Marine Corps consisted of the Advance Base Force at Quantico (in 1921 re-designated to the Expeditionary Force), which

included one infantry regiment, field artillery, signal, engineer, and chemical troops, and aviation detachment. A similar expeditionary force was planned for San Diego, but lasting personnel shortages prevented the stationing of more than one infantry regiment and one aircraft squadron there during the 1920s.

In 1920, lack of funds and people limited training and development of the Marine Corps for the next several years. Many of the Marine Corps exercises in the early 1920s were conducted with Army forces, reflecting the Marine experience as infantrymen in trench warfare during the World War I. But such service proved only that the marines were very good soldiers and did nothing to support the argument for the Marine Corps as separate from Army. This was one of the discussion issues between the Navy and Army for need to have such separate organization within total United States armed forces structure.

Operational planning after World War I

Until the eve of the Second World War, the armed services of the United States lacked strong and consistent policy guidance from political leaders and the State Department. In the absence of such guidance, the military attempted to deduce for themselves what constituted basic American national policies and objectives and to plan and prepare accordingly. In the 1920s and 1930s military and naval leaders believed that American national policy implied the following military missions: defense of the continental United States, Alaska and Hawaii, and the Panama Canal; defense of the Monroe Doctrine (America's anti-colonization, 1823, December 2); defense of the Philippines; and protection of American rights and interests in China.[15] <https://assignbuster.com/united-states-marine-corps-in-the-interwar-period-history-essay/>

For the United States in the interwar period, Japan represented the most likely enemy and one that only an extended naval campaign across the vast spaces of central Pacific Ocean could defeat. While political, business, educational, and religious leaders discounted the likelihood of war with Japan, senior officers of the American armed forces, especially those of the U. S. Navy and the Marine Corps, believed even before World War I that war with Japan had become for certain.[16]

American strategic planning for the Far East was actualized in the so-called Orange Plan. Orange was the color assigned to Japan in war games and planning exercises; Mexico was green, Great Britain red, and Germany black. The first Orange war plan (Japan as the enemy) was written before the First World War, and was hardly plan at all but rather statements of principles, which, it was hoped, could be followed in the event of war with Japan. A key difficulty for the U. S. Navy was the long distance and lack of coaling stations. An important political issue of the time was the rights of neutral nations to refuse access to belligerents. Spain, Britain, and Germany all held islands between the United States and the Philippines. Lack of bases for the U. S. fleet to reload coal meant having to violate someone's neutrality to move the fleet across the Pacific. The situation changed when Japan picked up Micronesia from Germany at end of World War I. Those islands became fair game for seizure as part of the U. S. counterattack.[17]

The Orange Plan assumed that upon the outbreak of war, Japan would immediately mount an attack on the Philippines. The planners did not think about a coalition war against Japan, or of attacking northwards from a position based on Australia. The U. S. had three choices:
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Before war started, build naval bases and airfields in the Philippines, and station forces there as a deterrent.

Once war started, immediately move the U. S. fleet to the Philippines to fight and win quickly.

Once the war started, move via the island chains in the central or southern Pacific, seizing bases for airfields. Eventually blockade Japan and wait for economic collapse.[18]

By 1921 the Navy Department had thoroughly reviewed War Plan Orange and drafted a new plan for war with Japan that envisioned the Japanese using her island territories and powerful new Navy to challenge the U. S. Navy in the Central Pacific. A key element of the new War Plan Orange was the recognition by Navy Department planners that the defeat of Japan would require the offensive seizure of island bases held by the Japanese as well as the more traditional task of defending the Navy's advanced Pacific bases. This shift from the exclusive consideration of defending naval bases to offensive seizure of new bases was a conceptual watershed that naturally suggested a significant new role for the Marine Corps.[19]

THE NEW ROLE AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

The Role of Senior Marine Leadership in Transformation Process

As the result of the wholesale failure of the British amphibious campaign at Gallipoli in the Dardanelles during World War I, the majority of the world's military theorists largely discounted amphibious assault as being too difficult, <https://assignbuster.com/united-states-marine-corps-in-the-interwar-period-history-essay/>

indeed almost impossible. Still, there were others who did not share this pessimism. Some Marine officers knew that the balance between a defender and an attacker was a dynamic relationship based on relative strength and tactical doctrine, not an absolute advantage to the defender.[20]

The first senior Marine military leader who recognized the amphibious assault as the primary Corps's wartime mission was Major General John A. Lejeune, the 13th Commandant of the Marine Corps (1920-1929). In his nearly nine years as Commandant, he guided the Corps toward the new role, and convinced three Presidents, Congress, the Navy, the public, and the apathetic, conservative officers within the Corps itself in necessity for reform. In addition, Lejeune understood the danger to the institutional existence of the Marine Corps, which was challenged by the Army leadership.

In response to the some skepticism within the Corps, the Commandant pointed out that Marine Corps did not abandon any of its traditional missions, including service in a land war with the Army, but he stressed that the wartime mission of the Corps was "to accompany the Fleet for operations ashore in support of the Fleet" and termed this wartime role "the real justification for the continued existence of the Marine Corps." After five days of the Washington Disarmament Conference, Lejeune argued in his memorandum to the General Board of the Navy, that there was no limitation on mobile forces for the seizure and defense of advanced bases. He also emphasized the importance of the American island of Guam because the United States had no naval bases between Honolulu and Manila.

In late 1920, the Commandant reorganized the Marine Corps Headquarters with establishing a new Operations and Training Division, which quickly developed into the heart of Marine Corps efforts to cope with its wartime functions. Warned that the Navy was making detailed versions of the War Plan Orange, Lejeune ordered Major Earl H. Ellis to analyze the requirements of amphibious operations across the central Pacific. In his secret report entitled "Advanced Base Force Operations in Micronesia", Ellis gave the valid geographical overview of the possible theater of operations and a specific enemy as well as some refined, if speculative, thoughts about the exact equipment and training required for opposed assault. On 23 July 1921 document was accepted by the Marine Corps' Commandant, and later, the Navy Department approved it as Operation Plan 712D (Annex to the Navy's War Plan Orange). The study became the blueprint for the Marine Corps' amphibious war planning, field exercises, equipment development, and officer education.

In 1921, under General Major Lejeune leadership, the Advance Base Force at Quantico was superseded by the Marine Corps Expeditionary Force, and simultaneously, the Corps begun primitive training in advance base assault. In 1924 and 1925 this force took part in extensive maneuvers in the Caribbean and in Hawaii. Based on the experience gained during first exercises, General Lejeune encouraged the Navy Department to make the revision of all responsibilities of the armed forces. In 1927, in the final version of "Joint Action of the Army and Navy", the Marine Corps not only retained its traditional missions (including service with the Army) but assumed responsibility for "land operations in support of the fleet for the

initial seizure and defense of advanced bases and for such limited auxiliary land operations as are essential to the prosecution of the naval campaign.”[21]Thus was laid the groundwork for what was to become the main occupation of the Corps. But the road from recommendation to concrete planning to actual implementation was a quite difficult.

In 1930, General Ben H. Fuller took the command over the Marine Corps. By this time, large Marine contingents were stationed abroad, notably in Nicaragua and China. The beginning of the Great Depression made the United States administration reduce Marine Corps enlisted strength. Neither funds nor personnel were available for the creation of an amphibious force as it was envisioned before. In addition, the conflict with the Army appraised again. The Army considered to transfer of Marine aviation to the Army Air Corps and to have the Marine Corps assumes all defense missions while laying aside expeditionary duty. In this bureaucratic, day-to-day fighting General Fuller was able to defend the existence of the Marine Corps, but unfortunately the reduction of the service manpower was a deal.

In 1933, as Marine units returned from China and Nicaragua, General Fuller saw an opportunity to integrate the old expeditionary forces into the fleet’s organizational structure, which might help the Corps to obtain more funds and encourage the Navy operating forces to train for amphibious warfare. Major General John H. Russell, who later commanded the Marine Corps, took the initiative in approaching the Chief of Naval Operations with a plan that would supplant the Expeditionary Force Staff at Quantico with a “ Fleet Base Defense Force” or “ Fleet Marine Force.” Under the new concept exposed by the Commandant, this force would not be subject to continuous interruption <https://assignbuster.com/united-states-marine-corps-in-the-interwar-period-history-essay/>

in training through detachment or diversion to other tasks. It was visualized that the new force would become an integral unit within the Fleet under operational control of the Commander in Chief, U. S. Fleet. General Russell's recommendation were approved by Navy Department General Order No. 241 and thus was created on 7 December 1933 the fleet Marine Force with headquarters at Quantico, Virginia, an event that was to be described as perhaps " the most significant development within the Marine Corps." [22]

The Marine Corps' Professional Military Education and Development of Amphibious Doctrine

To provide the intellectual background for the Corps' special role, it was decided in 1922 that the courses at the Marine Corps Schools should no longer be based only upon US Army curricula, but directed to the specific needs of the Corps. From the mid-1920s through the mid-1930s the curriculum on amphibious operations increased from about 25 percent to 60 percent of the total hours of instruction. The Company Officers School and the Field Grade Officers School not only provided adequate professional training but also served as a reservoir of faculty and student talent to study the Corps's new amphibious warfare role. The Marine Corps Schools gave an important vehicle for propelling Marine officers to new professional heights and indoctrinating them in Marine Corps Headquarters policy. The new syllabus included the research project on defense and seizure of Pacific islands which in itself was not exceptional, thorough as it was, but its importance lay in its association with a parallel study of " The Advanced Base Problem" and together, in simple terms, these added up to an analysis of how the Corps should undertake its new mission. [23] The professional

interaction on amphibious operations drew additional strength from the fact that marine officers attended the Naval War College, the Army War College, and the Army Command and General Staff College, and these officers carried on missionary work for the specialization.[24]

On November 14, 1933, all classes at Quantico were suspended and staff and students, some 70 officers, devoted all their time to producing a landing operations manual. Immediately following the establishment of the 3 000-man Fleet Marine Force, the Marine Corps Schools at Quantico prepared an amphibious operations manual which emphasized the essential role of heavy naval fire support, close air support, unity of command, rapid delivery of field artillery and tanks, restriction of equipment to fit the cargo holds, arming of assault craft, and careful placement of loads that reflected the order of their delivery to the beachhead. The finished guide was introduced as the “ Tentative Landing Operations Manual”. Within four years, the manual was to be adopted by the Navy as official doctrine for all landing operations. Subsequently, with additional modifications, it also emerged as an Army Field Manual.[25]

In this manual the command arrangements, frequently a problem in Army-Navy operations, were not expected to be as difficult because the Fleet Marine Force was already under the control of the fleet commander. The expedition would be organized as a task force under the fleet commander. The task force, called the naval task force, would be commanded by a Navy flag officer. The force would contain a landing force and a naval support force. The support force would consist of a fire support group, an air group (including aircraft carriers), an antisubmarine group, a transport group, and <https://assignbuster.com/united-states-marine-corps-in-the-interwar-period-history-essay/>

so for. The naval attack force commander would have ultimate authority over the landing force and support force commanders. This plan proved to be too simplistic, in practice, and was later modified based on landing force exercises.[26]

During this same period, the Corps focused its attention on still another field of special knowledge - its experience fighting "small wars". In 1922, Major Samuel M. Harrington pulled together the Marines' expertise, and his paper was incorporated in the Marine Corps Schools' curriculum. By 1940, the Corps had developed a unique "Small Wars Manual", which is still used for its pacification program in our days.[27]

In September 1935, Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force moved from Quantico to San Diego. At the same time, the Fleet Marine Force was organized into two brigades. The 1st Brigade was stationed at Quantico (East coast), while the 2nd moved to the Marine Corps Base, San Diego (West coast). In order to have available organization that could cope with the testing of equipment that was to be used for amphibious warfare, a Marine Corps Equipment Board was established at Quantico, which subsequently was instrumental in the development of the amphibian tractor.[28]

Experimentation, Exercises, and Development of Amphibious Warfare

The Marine amphibious doctrine was largely theory when it was first promulgated at Quantico in 1934. To put the theory into practice, major landing exercises were resumed. Beginning in February 1934, units of the Fleet Marine Force took part in the annual maneuvers of the U. S. Fleet. In

the Pacific, such maneuvers were held off the coast of California, in Hawaii, and at Midway, while similar landing exercises in the Atlantic were conducted in the Caribbean.

The first real chance to test the landing operations manual's theories came in 1935. By then, enough Marines were available to make up an expeditionary force. Fleet Landing Exercises (FLEXs), which took place each winter until Pearl Harbor, attacked the problems and tested the equipment for amphibious assault. In the course of the FLEXs the navy and marine corps experimented with about every imaginable amphibious technique and tactical approach allowed by their equipment. They tried day and night landings, smoke-screens, varieties of air and naval gunfire support, concentrated assaults and dispersed infiltrations, the firing of all sorts of weapons from landing craft, and array of demonstrations, feints, subsidiary landings, and broad-front attacks.[29]

Along with the refinement in landing techniques during the late 1930s, came the introduction of suitable vessels that would move an assault force from the troop transports to its objective. Following extensive experimentation and controversy, Higgins-designed landing craft were found to be best suited to this purpose, and their manufacture in large numbers was initiated.[30]

The fleet exercises provided additional experience to refine the concepts in the "Tentative Manual" now rose to the monumental status of Fleet Training Publication 167 (Landing Operations Doctrine, USN, 1938) and issued under the imprimatur of the chief of naval operations. The exercises also refined

the mobilization concept and training embodied in Marine Corps Contributory Plan (C-2, Orange), reviewed and revised each year in the 1930s.[31]

Although fully able to tackle the doctrinal problems of the amphibious assault, the Marine Corps was too deficient in strength to be taken seriously as a war-ready force. Therefore increasing attention was paid to the Marine Corps Reserve. Reorganized under legislation passed in 1925, the Reserve fell into two categories, companies of the Fleet Marine Corps Reserve and individuals of the Volunteer Marine Corps Reserve.[32]As result of it, by December 1940 the 1st to 23rd Marine Organized Reserve battalions had been mobilized. In June 1941 Fleet and Volunteer Reservists not assigned to Organized Reserve units were mobilized, resulting in over 15 000 reservists in all categories being recalled. Marine Reserve units were essentially manpower pools. Once mobilized, they were absorbed into active units, which helped eliminate differences between regulars and reservists.[33]

In 1936 and again in 1938, elements of the U. S. Army participated in some of the landing exercises, but in 1938 the