

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE (VIA TELECONFERENCE) SUBJECT: THE MISSION OF THE BOXER EXPEDITIONARY STRIKE GROUP AND THE 13TH MARINE EXPEDITIONARY UNIT BRIEFERS: COMMODORE PETER DALLMAN, COMMANDER, BOXER EXPEDITIONARY STRIKE GROUP/AMPHIBIOUS SQUADRON FIVE; COLONEL DAVID COFFMAN, COMMANDING OFFICER, 13TH MARINE EXPEDITIONARY UNIT; CAPTAIN MARK CEDRUN, COMMANDING OFFICER, USS BOXER TIME: 3:00 P.M. EST DATE: WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2008

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CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Commodore Dallman, we'll let you open it up if you've got some opening remarks. Thanks for joining us here for the Bloggers Roundtable today.

COMMODORE DALLMAN: Well, thank you for having us. I do have brief opening comment that I'll read for you guys to give you an idea of who we are and who you're talking to today and how we fit into this whole scheme here. The Boxer Expeditionary Strike Group and the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit, or MEU, are preparing to deploy in support of operational tasking from the unified combatant commanders. Our ESG and the 13th MEU recently conducted an expeditionary strike group (integration ?) exercise at sea back in October. We are currently at sea conducting the composite training unit exercise, or COMPTUEX, training the Navy and Marine Corps team in scenarios that we may face in our upcoming deployments. We have one more at-sea period where we will conduct the certification exercise that certifies Marines as ready to deploy.

The 13th MEU and Boxer ESG teams' primary capabilities are maritime security operations, decisive combat operations and other operations, including humanitarian assistance. We are fully integrated at -- (inaudible) -- capable teams, and we are prepared to carry out a broad spectrum of mission actions from any unified combatant commander.

The strike group itself, Boxer Expeditionary Strike Group, is comprised of five Navy ships: USS Boxer, which is a multipurpose amphibious assault ship; USS New Orleans, the second ship of the new San Antonio class and also a multipurpose assault ship; the dock landing ship USS Comstock; the cruiser USS Lake Champlain; and the destroyer USS Chung-Hoon. Additionally, the Coast Guard cutter Boutwell will sail with us. I am the commander of the Boxer Group Expeditionary Strike Group.

The 13th MEU, Marine Expeditionary Unit, or the Fighting 13th, is commanded by Colonel Dave "Stretch" Coffman, who is also here with me today. He commands about 2,200 Marines who are currently spread across the three amphibious assault ships' decks. The MEU is comprised of battalions, Battalion

Landing Team 11, Combat Logistics Battalion 13, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163.

The colonel and I have a support team relationship, which means that neither one of us works for the other, but rather we work together. Based on the missions and the tasking, and perhaps even the phase of the tasking, one of us is the support (head ?) commander and the other is the support team commander. So it's a gentleman's relationship rather than a classic senior-subordinate relationship. It requires us to work together to achieve our objectives and accomplish our missions.

More importantly, this relationship produces a flexible configuration that makes the Boxer ESG 13th MEU team an effective and versatile platform for not only protecting combat power, but also accomplishing other missions such as providing humanitarian assistance and/or disaster relief mentioned previously.

The third member of the team here today is the CO of USS Boxer, Captain Mark Cedrun. Captain Cedrun commands one of the Navy's nine "Big Deck" amphibious ships. Boxer is almost 45,000 tons and 840 feet long. It possesses extensive aviation intermediate repair facilities, as well as six operating rooms. It can also launch three outcast -- (background noise) -- vehicles as well. Boxer can accommodate approximately 3,000 sailors and Marines on board and hold over 30 aircraft. Boxer serves as my flagship and, as such, is the centerpiece of the ESG.

So with that, gentlemen, I now open the floor -- we now open the floor for your questions.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir, thank you very much.

Andrew, you were first on line, so why don't you get us started?

Q Hey, gentlemen, first of all, thank you all for your time this afternoon. This is Andrew Lubin. I write for Naval Institute's magazine Proceedings.

For Colonel Coffman and also for Commodore Dallman, where are you going off to, and do you anticipate being offloaded and then doing any combat ops in Iraq or Afghanistan?

COL. COFFMAN: This is Colonel Coffman over here for 13th MEU. We have not received specific tasking. We have -- which I know you're familiar with, as far as global force management scheduling and that, so we have a scheduled departure early next year and a tentative rough schedule against the AO and as far as who we're going to work for. But we have not received any specific tasking from PACOM or CENTCOM pertinent to getting put ashore anywhere.

As you know from the recent history, CENTCOM, if this is what you're specifically asking, has used the MEUs both ways, into sustained ops ashore or in a reserve or contingency role. So that has not been sorted out for us yet. So in its preparation phase, as the commodore said, we just kind of prepare for our whole show. So we'll take our mission list and be prepared to go both ways.

I work for Lieutenant General (name inaudible) -- here in the forum and train phase, and he's kind of -- (inaudible) -- us to go both ways, and it's had us concentrate more on our sea-based Marine air-ground task force for the green side of it here. But we do not yet have our tasking for in theater.

Q Okay, great. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And Chuck.

Q Hi, gentlemen. Chuck Simmons from America's North Shore Journal.

Commodore, first of all, would you repeat the name of the ship in your task group? I did not -- especially I did not catch the destroyer name.
COMMODORE DALLMAN: Sure. The destroyer is the Chung-Hoon. That's C-H-U-N-G, dash, H-O-O-N. And it's named after actually an American admiral that served in World War II around the time of Pearl Harbor who was actually of Chinese heritage.

Q Ah, okay.

COMMODORE DALLMAN: It's a Hawaii-based destroyer.

Q Okay. Then for the colonel, sir, how many total boots on the ground would you have if you were given a combat mission?

COL. CEDRUN: That would depend on what they specifically ask us to do. We have really -- I'm training towards three different models or modes of employment.

We have a sea-based Marine air-ground task force model where Commodore Dallman supports us and hosts us across his decks, and we kind of go into shore and do some stuff and come back out. We use that kind of model for humanitarian assistance ops, so we could use it for kinetic ops to do raids or other type missions like that.

We have the model, which is kind of what Andrew was talking about, that the combatant commander wants to take us off the ships and put us all the way into a fight, OIF, OEF or other, where we would come all the way off. And then we have an in-between, which I describe as one foot in the sea and one foot on the land. So we can kind of dial it up any number of ways, depending on what our bosses want.

As he said in his opening, we'll probably sail out with about 2,200 Marines and sailors under my command that give us that range of capability. And it's -- whatever our chain of command asks for, but up to a maximum capability that a kind -- (inaudible) -- Marine side for Marine Expeditionary Unit level is to be able to put a force in, self-sustaining force for about 15 days of work. We'd take all those supplies and (inaudible) on the ship and I've got pretty good protection capability to operate independently like that, but that's not really why we've trained this way. So our direction -- and you can read, I'm sure, in General Conway, the commandant's campaign plan and his literature that we are really working with Commodore Dallman and Captain Feder and these folks to emphasize the Navy-Marine Corps team.

So we've really specialized in working off of these amphibious ships and kind of working from the sea. But again, recap -- we can do it any way they want it to. We can dial it up for a short-term duration mission with company-size elements that are smaller, we can unload all the way off shipping and work ashore under another component in any of the theaters or we can get split the difference and work back and forth. And that's the way we're training up this fall.

Is that what you're looking for?

Q Yeah. Do you have Marine combat air along and Marine artillery along? COL. COFFMAN: Yes. Great question. Yeah, we do. We're the smallest Marine air ground task force, the Marine Expeditionary Unit, so like all Marine air ground task force, we have a command element. We have a ground combat element based on infantry, and in this case, a battalion landing team, Delta Routing Infantry Battalion with detachments. Those detachments do include artillery, tanks and tractors, amphibious tractors, light-armored reconnaissance. So we have a small slice of the whole suite of a division level assets for regular ground combat arms.

Then I have a reinforced squadron for Marine Expeditionary Unit work. We anchor those around the HMMs that have the CH-46s. But the same way I have a little miniature wing, so I have the whole array -- all the Marine Corps helicopters, CH-53 large assaults and we have CH-46 troop carriers Al-Whiskey-Cobra gunships and UH-1 Yankee utility helicopters and then also a handful of AV-8B Jump Jets.

So we have a little miniature wing, same way, and in the third leg, ground combat, air combat and then our logistics combat is the combat logistics Battalion 13 that Commodore mentioned in his opening statement and they work across all the elements to provide our logistics capability combat service support.

Q Well, thank you, Colonel, and a belated Happy Birthday to the Marine Corps.

COL. COFFMAN: Well, fantastic. Thank you for recognizing that. Yeah, we're 233 years old. We don't look a day over 200. (Laughter.)

MR. HOLT: And -- (name inaudible).

Q It's good to talk to you, gentlemen this afternoon. This is Raymond Pritchett, I blog for Information Dissemination. I have a question on the make-up of the strike group. I noticed that the USS Milius had been mentioned as part of the strike group up until this point, and the captain did not mention the ship. I was wondering if there was a reason. Did it -- is it different tasking or just no longer part of the group?

COL. COFFMAN: Well, that's a good question. Milius had been previous -- had been part of our group, but it's been decided that she's going to deploy separately and not as part of our group -- (inaudible) -- missions.

Q The second question was in regards to the Boutwell. I know that in the Pacific you guys have deployed cutters with your ESGs in the past. I'm just curious. I understand the cooperative function that is gained when you have all three of the maritime services together. I'm just wondering if there is a specific role or purpose for the inclusion of the cutter as part of the strike group? Is there -- are you planning exercises that emphasize more law enforcement? Is that the reasoning? Is there some sort of specific reason that you're bringing the Boutwell along? COL. COFFMAN: You want me to answer that? Okay. Because I -- we took one on (inaudible.) I mean, the primary reason is because countries, potential countries --

(Cross talk.)

COMMODORE DALLMAN: Go ahead, Mark.

CAPT. CEDRUN: Yeah, this is Mark Cedrun, CO of the Boxer. You're pretty much on target. I'll echo what the colonel said and that we don't specifically know what our tasking is going to be once we go, but having done a CARAT deployment, which is a cooperative and readiness afloat training deployment with the Coast Guard cutter Morgenthau, the possibility exists that if we are tasked to go to a country en route to wherever they're sending us that a lot of these folks are very interested in our Coast Guard and how the Coast Guard operates off American shores and they like to mirror that and apply that to their own country. And that's what I saw when I did CARAT in 2002 when we went to various countries in Southeast Asia.

So they were very interested in coastal patrol, law enforcement, coastal defense and bringing a Coast Guard cutter along with us. You've got the pros from Dover and they're very interested in how our Coast Guard operates. So that's the primary purpose.

CAPT. CEDRUN: And I would also add in there that, obviously, there's a broad array of maritime missions and tasks that the Navy side -- that we're tasked to do in maritime environment, which is not only the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Coast Guard pitch into the fight, but also, you know, obviously, we're working with many coalition partners to fulfill those tasks in order to create stable conditions at sea which are going to allow economic prosperity to continue and enhance global security. So the whole idea of the Coast Guard is pitching into the fight and helping us continue to support from the maritime side in order to fulfill those missions of the combatant commanders.

MR. HOLT: Did you guys request the cutter, or was it assigned to you from your boss? How did that come about to where the cutter gets to be integrated into the strike group?

CAPT. CEDRUN: Well, that's probably more of a question for the Coast Guard. They -- obviously, they're aware of our schedules and we work the Navy and Coast Guard together in order to get to an agreement where they would deploy with us.

So it's a little bit above my pay grade to articulate exactly how that was discussed, but, you know, certainly it's a handshake agreement between the Navy and the Coast Guard to reach an agreement on how and when they are going to deploy ships with strike groups. As a matter of fact, the Boxer did have a Coast Guard cutter with us last time we deployed as well, so it certainly is not uncommon. Q And the final question I was going to ask about the ships is, this will be the first deployment for the USS New Orleans and -- I mean, even today, Time Magazine runs a story -- I think, the quote was pretty brutal. Something about a floating fiasco when they were talking about the San Antonio.

Are you guys concerned about this? Is this -- are you taking any measures to account for the possibility that the New Orleans may run into some problems per se on its first deployment similar to how the San Antonio was?

COL. COFFMAN: Yeah. This is Colonel Coffman from the 13th MEU. We are always concerned with the material condition and readiness of the ships, but I can tell you we've done two underways with my Marines on that deck. We have elected and we are the first to do this. They didn't do it with San Antonio. I have put my battalion landing team headquarters on New Orleans.

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MR. HOLT: Thank you very much. I think we've got everybody back online and --

Q Colonel right as we got disconnected you mentioned that you had moved your BLT HQ to the -- New Orleans.

Is that what you're -- had said?

COL. COFFMAN: Yeah, I'll pick it up from there, thank you. Yeah, with the capacity of the New Orleans -- and I know you're familiar with that from your question regarding San Antonio -- with this three ship amphibious group out of the West Coast here with LHD Class with Captain Fedrins ship, San Antonio class with the New Orleans and then our LSD (sp), we've got a tremendous leap in capacity in terms of vehicle stowage and, or vehicle cube or square feet and cube stowage. So one thing is we've got a tremendous increase from what has become a very challenging problem for us here, as marine equipment has gotten bigger and heavier with armoring up and whatnot. So we're the -- really the first West Coast MEU here in the last few years that's been able to kind of get all of our stuff well established on board and be able -- (audio break) -- we're off again.

MR. HOLT: I think we're off. We're still good?

COL. COFFMAN: You guys are staying on? Am I still on?

MR. HOLT: Yes, sir. Yeah

Q Yeah, you're on. You're good.

COL. COFFMAN: Okay. So we were the first MEU to be able to get this much stuff aboard, so that's -- and to put it across the decks to permit the distributed ops of the ships working separate areas. And that's, of course, led us to putting -- I have a flag on each ship. My CLB is on the LSD (sp); my BLT headquarters is on New Orleans; and the MEU command element and squadron, of course, are on the flagship over here.

And what I was going to tell you was we've gained great confidence in New Orleans' ship and crew and have done what the ship was bought to do, particularly over the two (inaudible) periods here of integrated training. We've been able to execute a mechanized raid profile off the New Orleans, basically as an independent platform with our amtrack and tanks and LCACs (sp) working off of that deck. So we're very excited about the increased capacity and capability of that ship. So as far as the employment end of it, which is my part of the business, we're really excited to have New Orleans aboard and have gained increased confidence during the workup period here. And I can probably throw it back to Commodore Dallman if he wants to talk about blue side material condition or any questions regarding that.

Do you want to pick that part up, Pete?

COMMODORE DALLMAN: Sure, sure. Obviously we have specifically addressed the material concerns that we had from before and we're continually

working to improve materials -- (inaudible). As the colonel said, we are always concerned about the material status of our ships. That's something that's very top of our list. But I would echo his confidence in this ship's abilities, capabilities to deploy on time and task, and be able to be flexible to respond to tasking from our, from our group, from the Colonel, or me or from higher authorities.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

COL. COFFMAN: And let me jump back in on that too because I hit the bottom for the well deck and vehicle deck which were laid out beautifully to be able to do mech work and LCAC (sp) work. And the other improvement, as you probably know, is enhanced aviation capabilities. So the ship is designed to hold an aviation deck. We have exercised three different models of that during our workup in terms of the type of aircraft mix we would send over there. So again, it allows us to take that ship and kind of give it an entire mission to itself with a decent aviation compliment upstairs and then the way we put it together in terms of our assignment to shipping with mech capability coming out of the well deck. So for the employment and great capability and flexibility at how to employ that platform.

Q Now Colonel Coffman, you said three different types of aviation on the LPD, are you talking about not just 46s but also you're talking about the H-1s as well, different groups or -- what does that mean?

COL. COFFMAN: Yeah, that's correct. So for example, if we were going to put the New Orleans against their mechanized raid or more of a kinetic mission then we can go ahead and put their fire support over there as well.

So we have exercised putting a AH-1 and UH-1 get over there which gives them there, basically self-contained capability with rotary-wing casts and then mechanized forces out of the well deck. If we were to send New Orleans, or focus them on less kinetic or humanitarian assistance or other ops, I can put assault helicopters over there, 46's or even 53's and give them assault support that has evacuation or those type of missions. So we're playing with the right kind of combinations to maximize the utility of that deck. As you probably know, I mean we started with the expanded spot LPD's some years ago to increase the aviation capabilities across the decks. But again, with this mix, and I'll throw in Comstock as well, so the increased capacity of the New Orleans has permitted us to reclaim the flight deck of Comstock. Over the last 10, 15 years we have frequently had to put cargo and vehicles up on top of Comstock, on top of LSDs, again because of our space issue. We are able to get what we wanted aboard. Clear two spots on Comstock so we have a good ready divert deck on Comstock. We have a secondary airport on New Orleans. And, of course, here with Captain Fedrin's ship, we have our primary air platform. So I would argue the same way, the addition of the New Orleans has got us back to a really good quality spread in terms of aviation capability to operate across all three of the amphib platforms. So we're delighted with that as well and so we're just kind of writing, or practicing the procedures and kind of the SOPs, the standard operating procedures of what kind of decks would best fit over there and best work over there with that enhanced aviation capability.

Q Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: Okay, David.

Q Hi, this is David Axe from War is Boring. Thanks for taking the time to talk to us. Can everyone hear me okay?

COMMODORE DALLMAN: Sure, you're very welcome.

Q Great. I wanted to see if -- I guess this question is for the Commodore. In your assessment have there been some recent lessons learned, perhaps from observing the Kearsarge's humanitarian operations over in the -- in Latin America? Are you taking with you any new ideas regarding humanitarian assistance for this deployment?

COMMODORE DALLMAN: Well, great question, I'm glad you asked that. Obviously there are -- I shouldn't say obviously -- I would say that I'm one of the few guys in the Navy that's commanded a mission like that. Kearsarge's mission is called Continuing Promise. It's in the Caribbean, as you know, from August until December. Boxer actually completed the Pacific phase of Continuing Promise earlier this year, in May and June, as we went down and -- to ship Boxer to Guatemala and El Salvador and Peru. We had 22 days, served over 24,000 people down there and then came back up and now we're into the workup. So we have good familiarity with what the mission entails. We have lots of people here that have been involved in that mission.

And so I think we're enormously better off and more well-trained for having done that mission. We've learned a lot of things. So I think we're -- and a lot of the preparation for this kind of thing is on the training side and thinking about this stuff in advance. And we've done a lot of that here in Boxer, lots of sponsorships, companies and also my staff and the docs that are on board. So I think we have a good capability to spring into that type of mission later on. It feeds, obviously, into United States maritime strategy that was just signed last October by the Commandant of the Marine Corps, the Commandant of the Coast Guard and the Chief of Naval Operations, which highlights the importance of working with partners to achieve missions like this where we're increasing security and stability of partnering nations throughout the world, western Pacific and in the South America and Latin America regions have been where we have been going so far so -- does that answer your question?

Q It does, but I'd like to follow up. In contrast to "Operation Continuing Promise", both phases of it, you're deploying with a full load of Marines and a lot of aviation and all those heavy combat equipment. Is that, in the event that you are called upon for some sort of short notice humanitarian mission, would the fact that you're full of all this gear and Marines, would that have any bearing on your ability to -- to conduct such a mission?

COL. COFFMAN: This is Colonel Coffman again from the 13th MEU. Actually it will enhance the Commodore and I's capability to do that. So we have our mission essential task list, or the things that the Commandant trains organizers and equips us to do includes humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. And, in fact, during our mission analysis, and aligned with my chain of command humanitarian assistance and disaster relief is in fact the most likely mission for 13th MEU.

So again, focused on our workup period here, we are training with the Commodore Dallman and the ESG, practicing those very things. So you correctly point out that the same capabilities that make us an effective fighting force, really, we turn around and apply them to humanitarian ops.

So just as you said, helicopters. Helicopters are the best thing you can have in your pocket when you go to disaster relief or humanitarian ops, as you're probably familiar.

But the same applies when you go to my trucks and track vehicles and everything else.

So the same things would apply to combat missions or to support ourselves, we can turn around and apply to humanitarian ops. And as I said, better than that, we don't see that as a "that might happen." We're preparing for that as a fundamental tasking of what expeditionary strike groups and Marine expeditionary units are forward-deployed to do, as the commodore pointed out, in alliance with the Navy/Marine Corps strategy.

So we're prepared to -- I'll give you my -- (audio break) -- blog here. I tell my Marines that we built this MEU to save the good guys and kill the bad guys, so we're prepared to operate across the full range of conflict. So we can -- our chain of command can send us into disaster or into humanitarian relief situations.

They can send us into military-to-military engagement for training. And they can send us into kinetic -- as everybody wants to call them now, basic -- combat operations that involve actually delivering kinetic ops and killing bad guys.

So we tell our bosses we'll do the windows and we'll scrub the toilets, too. So -- the taxpayers bought this force and trained it, to employ it in accordance with what the combatant commanders want to do. And we are very, very proud as a MEU and as the Marine Corps of the range of capabilities that we offer to the combatant commanders.

Q Great. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Jerrad, you still with us? Jerrad?

Okay. Well, if -- we've got just a couple more minutes, we've got just a little bit of time for follow up.

Andrew?

Q Yeah, Colonel, Andrew Lubin again, from "Proceedings."

Sir, if you'd taken tracks and LARs out, that sounds like the first normal MEU in quite a while then, is question number one. (Laughter.) And question number two is -- you know, the 24th -- they left all that stuff back in the States, so I was kind of curious. And also, are you training up to do any pirate-type missions? Obviously, the Somalia-type thing gets worse and worse every day, we read in the newspaper.

COL. COFFMAN: Okay, I'll take the first one.

Actually, here I'm not as familiar with the East Coast -- I'm obviously aware of 24 MEU's fly-in mission, which was completely off the page of a regular -- didn't do (e-base ?) workup and all the rest.

But as far as for the regular -- and this is true for East Coast as well, 26 MEU forward and 22 MEU in workup now -- but for us, the last couple, as

I described, we have attempted to keep pretty close to the force mix in terms of capabilities, combat vehicles and whatnot, over the last few rotations.

What's been the challenge, as I said, really have been fitting them in the assigned shipping. So we have had some -- left stuff behind or had some creative work to try and bring all the toys, if you will.

So again, with the San Antonio class shipping and going to the LHDs, we've kind of worked around that problem. And I told my boss, General Hellen (sp) that we were in very, very good shape in terms of the spread of combat power that we're able to get out. So that has been -- intent, to get that stuff on there.

I should probably also add, for the commandant, that we also have charter, as you've heard it, I know, his concerns about us getting too wet, too heavy, sustained ops to shore, big vehicles, MRAPs, all the heavy stuff. So his views, the commandant's views are, as always, kind of a test bed or a counter-trend to get us back towards expeditionary, more of our traditional light infantry mission.

So we're working on that as well. As I said, if you get a chance to come walk around these decks with us, we've got some heavy stuff and big stuff, and it's not matched to -- with the lag of building ships and how quickly you can turn around vehicles, so -- it's very challenging.

So don't get me wrong, we're too heavy. That's the commandant's position. I agree with him. So it makes it challenging. We're out here practicing getting stuff off of these ships by LCU and LCAC, and it's hard work.

So we need to get -- back towards our expeditionary culture, and that includes our vehicles. That includes hardening our Marines to be able to operate that way, and kind of the whole set of going back to that expeditionary, forward-deployed role.

As far as the piracy or counter-piracy issues and that kind of work, which you're talking, I think -- (inaudible) -- the Horn of Africa, but it's everywhere, I'm going to cut that back over to the commodore, if you want to pick that up --

Q Okay, thank you.

COMMODORE DALLMAN: Okay. And when you at the -- (inaudible) -- ruling in counter-piracy operations, and obviously it's becoming a bit of an issue in different areas around the world, the International Maritime Bureau in -- (inaudible) -- worldwide agency which tracks piracy, and they do that by having commercial shipping agencies report piracy to them, and they monitor and track all that data.

For the U.S. Navy side, we work closely with the coalition ships in various regions as part of our continual presence that we're trying to establish and maintain, in carefully monitoring the situation.

So as I'm sure you can imagine, the very nature of piracy and counter-piracy operations requires that we work quietly with partners and allies in trying to conduct counter-piracy operations.

But the bottom line, again, is that piracy is an international problem -- (audio break) -- requires an international solution. We are committed to getting operations to deter piracy, counter-piracy and any other -- (inaudible) -- that can be -- (audio break) -- in the maritime arena.

And we just see it as part of the lawful maritime -- (inaudible).

Q Okay, thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right. Anyone else?

Q This is Chuck.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Go ahead, Chuck.

Q Yeah. For the colonel, loading and unloading your equipment and then having the equipment on shipboard, what kind of wear and tear does that put on your equipment? And does that -- is that kind of a limit as to the -- what you can do if you're given a mission, or are you able to make enough repairs and stuff to have your equipment capable, despite the wear and tear?

COL. COFFMAN: That's a good question, and we are practicing that this week, here, out here.

So we have been doing our beach work, for example, where we take our utility landing craft and drive in and "stab the beach," as they say, and then drive the vehicles right off in the surf there. So you wouldn't want to do that to your car, I suspect, but we do it routinely to our Humvees and trucks. So yeah, it's a huge -- huge consideration in terms of maintaining our vehicles and all our gear. But we are kind of postured to do that. That's why, again, we have the right mix of repair capability. We -- frankly, we do a lot better when we're aboard ship in terms of supply and that stuff, because the Navy long ago figured out how to make stuff get to the right ship. So we integrate -- we have a program in place here. We're trying to increase the integration with the Navy logistics side to include our ground combat items.

And we, of course, belong to the Navy in terms of Navy aviation logistics, so Captain Cedrun has a floating intermediate maintenance facility for aircraft as part of his organization. We marry in with them to do intermediate-level repair on our aircraft.

So you're right, it's a super-challenging environment with salt water, corrosion, and harsh conditions. But that's what we do. That's why we buy and build and maintain the stuff, the Marine Corps equipment. We're not doing it right if it was not bought, built and cared for to put it aboard amphibious shipping and take it forward, because that's -- that's what the Marine Corps does for a living.

Mark, do you want to -- or (B.D. ?), do you all want to comment on maintenance aboard or anything related to that?

Okay. Does that answer that?

Q Yeah. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Thank you very much, gentlemen.

COL. COFFMAN: Sure.

MR. HOLT: Commodore, Captain, or Colonel Coffman, anybody have any closing thoughts for us?

COMMODORE DALLMAN: Well, I would like to say happy birthday two days late to the United States Marine Corps. We are pleased and honored to have them on board our ships.

We, as part of Boxer Expeditionary Strike Group and the -- (inaudible) -- Marines are proud to serve our country, and we are working very hard to prepare for when we are called on, to look forward to our mission -- (inaudible) -- commander's task -- (inaudible) -- in support of the order of the president of the United States, and we are very deeply honored to serve your country.

COL. COFFMAN: And I would add a closing 30 seconds to the Commodore's remarks. We had our birthday, as you say, out here this week. The youngest Marine on Boxer was born in 1989. The youngest Marines on New Orleans was born in 1990. So a plug for our young Marines and sailors.

These are all young Americans that signed up after 9/11, well after 9/11. In fact, they don't hardly remember 9/11 because they were 10 or 11 years old. So they signed up with the war already on, and it's a great, great, great privilege for all of us. You're talking to all the old guys, but the superstars are the young guys that work on these flight decks and in these well decks to keep all these vehicles running and then are prepared to go and fight and bleed and die. So we've got -- I've got 2,200 of them. The Commodore's got that number or better on the sailor side. So it's our great privilege to try and lead these young Americans. And they well know what they're getting into, to take them into harm's way and do that, the range of missions for our combatant commanders.

So we're just super proud of the Marines and sailors of the Boxer ESG and 13th MEU.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you very much, gentlemen, for being with us today. We do appreciate it, and hopefully we can speak again.

COMMODORE DALLMAN: Well, that would be wonderful. And thank you for asking us to dial in and be part of this conversation. We hope it was helpful to you guys.

MR. HOLT: Yes, sir, it was. Thank you very much.

Q Great. Gentlemen, thanks very much. Colonel, Semper Fi.

Q Thank you.

COL. COFFMAN: Thank you.

END.