

# The Marine Strike Regiment

Relabeling the Marine Littoral Regiment  
for better public understanding and unit esprit

by Rich Hegmann

For those in the know, the name Marine Littoral Regiment (MLR) and the word “littoral” perfectly convey the Marine Corps’ transition from an expeditionary focus to the radical innovations and force redesigns needed to prepare for the demands of naval campaigning along and from the shores. The new MLR is a parent organization that will experiment with and prepare the myriad smaller, subordinate Marine operating elements that, in cooperation with the U.S. Navy, would lurk and move among the littorals, initially in the Pacific, deterring China by holding its surface fleet and maritime air assets at risk. During this organizational transition, the Corps’ other longstanding Marine expeditionary task forces will continue to conduct a wide range of presence, humanitarian relief, and crisis response operations by employing raids, landings, airpower, and, potentially, sustained operations ashore. The MLR, meanwhile, will largely be held out of the day-to-day fray and instead focus on propelling innovation toward the Corps’ now defining role of naval campaigning in the littorals.

Littoral is so perfect a word that Marines may not recognize that outsiders—including the American public, who will need to fund and support the Service redesign—may be less familiar with the term. Because Marines and defense experts are so comfortable with the word, it may be hard to relate to how outsiders may view the word littoral as unclear jargon. People readily can visualize a mountain division, an arctic unit, or a jungle patrol, but littoral will have

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*The Marine Strike Regiment would field what the Commandant has called mobile units with “low signatures, bad attitudes and toolkits full of disruptive capabilities.” (Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Jesse Awalt.)*

many reaching for their dictionaries, if they bother. The “tyranny of expertise” may blind us to the non-expert’s likely unfamiliarity with littoral. Last, were Winston Churchill with us today, he might note how in oration—or in Congressional testimony—the “Ls” and “Rs” of “littoral regiment” tend to meld into an unwieldy mouthful.

The MLR nomenclature is so new that little would be lost by a near-term

renaming of the MLR to a “Marine Strike Regiment” (MSR). Before outlining the advantages of replacing littoral with strike, we first need to dispose of several other possible alternatives. Synonyms for littoral include “shore” and “coastal,” but they evoke shore patrols and coast guards. The missions of sea denial and sea control suggest words like “maritime” and “naval,” but these are largely redundant and inherent to the

name Marine. Flipping back yet again from “expeditionary” to “amphibious” (e.g., Marine Amphibious Units) would be familiar to Marines, but amphibious harkens to traditional and outmoded large-scale World War II-style amphibious landings by large, vulnerable ships. (In fact, if we consider Marines as soldiers of the sea, amphibious and comfortable where land meets sea, the word littoral is even a bit redundant to the word Marine.) Finally, other words that echo the historical antecedents of expeditionary advanced base operations (EABO), namely the Corps’ advanced base forces and base defense units of the 1930s and 1940s, today seem outmoded, static, and passive.

A MSR implies a hard-hitting and aggressive unit capable of reaching out and destroying adversary naval combatants and aircraft. The MSR would be fielding what the Commandant has called mobile units with “low signatures, bad attitudes and toolkits full of disruptive capabilities,” conducting “sea control and sea denial operations both from the sea and from key maritime terrain.”<sup>1</sup> Even though the MSR as now envisioned will not typically deploy and fight in one place as a unit, its subordinate operating teams would be formed and molded by a higher unit that carries a clear title

reflecting dynamic and aggressive action.

Now, one “inside the family” negative of strike is that it can be viewed as codifying the perceived displacement of the Marine Corps’ cultural essence as a close combat infantry force by the rising dominance of long-range precision strike fires. At root, Marines conducting EABOs might be viewed less as infantry and more as artillery forward observers directing anti-ship missiles, surface-to-surface precision fires ala HIMARs, drone swarms, and dynamic tasking of Marine air. Yet the word strike, like raider, can also encompass Marine raider special operations and Marine infantry missions that place an emphasis on classic infantry skills involving patrolling and reconnaissance, stealthy displacement, and close combat. The infantry roots of strike are also exemplified by the “Strike-Hold” motto of a U.S. Army parachute infantry regiment. Finally, as this article was being drafted, the British Royal Marines announced the formation of a new Vanguard Strike Company that will field test new operational commando concepts.<sup>2</sup> In sum, the name strike fits existing and traditional aspects of our current MEUs conducting raids or other operations-from-the-sea in lightening quick maneuvers. But ultimately, and

in a nod to the future, the name strike speaks to the fundamental essence of the new EABO mission set: hitting adversary naval combatants from hidden ambush sites along the shore—along the littorals.

The name MSR clearly conveys change, is easy for the American public to understand, and keeps with the public’s association of Marines as our Nation’s elite naval shock troops. Try saying it to yourself now: Marine Littoral Regiment. Marine Strike Regiment. Which sounds better? And in which would you rather serve?

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#### Notes

1. Todd South and Philip Athey, “We Are the Front Line,” *Marine Corps Times*, (November 2019), available at <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com>.

2. Staff, “Royal Marines Commando Unit Created To Shape the Future Commando Force,” Royal Navy (July 2020), available at <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/>.

