
Epilogue

Operation Littoral Chaos

“... there has been speculation that war itself may not have a future and is about to be replaced by economic competition among the great ‘trading blocks’ now forming in Europe, North America, and the Far East. This ... view is not correct. Large-scale, conventional war—war as understood by today’s principal military powers—may indeed be at its last gasp; however, war itself, war as such, is alive and kicking and about to enter a new epoch.”¹

—Martin van Creveld

The case studies in chapter 4 provide examples of the historical application of the different expeditionary concepts. However, because of continuing doctrinal, technological, tactical, and other advancements, no historical example can do full justice to the current and future applications of those concepts. The following fictional vignette is intended to illustrate the expeditionary principles established in chapter 2 and the potential near-future application of operational maneuver from the sea and other expeditionary concepts described in chapter 4—all in a deteriorating, chaotic, political environment such as depicted in chapter 1.

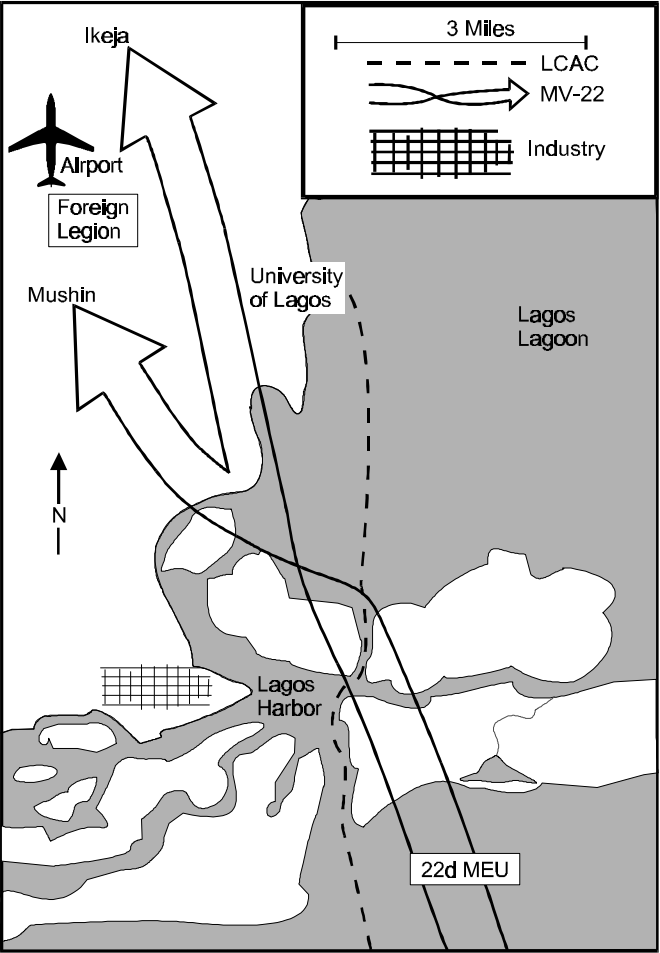
CASE STUDY: WEST AFRICA, 2017–18

The West African War of 2017–18 had its origins in the collapse of civil and governmental order in the overpopulated, disease-infested slums of the African coast from Lagos in Nigeria to Conakry in Guinea. By 2017, Lagos had become the second largest city in the world with a population of some 25 million, most of them living in squalor in the burgeoning shanty slums north of the old city. Lagos had long since ceased to be under governmental control. Rule was instead divided among competing tribal groups and criminal groups with their own organized paramilitaries equipped by the growing Sudanese arms industry. A combination epidemic of malaria and HIV was the spark that ignited the war. An outbreak of malaria resistant to

mefloquine necessitated treatment by blood transfusion, which accelerated the already-rapid spread of HIV. By May 2017, some health organizations were estimating the death toll from the epidemic at between a quarter and half a million. In early June, as the United Nations debated courses of action, mass violence erupted between Muslim Hausa and Fulani tribes on the one hand and Christian Yorubas and Ibos on the other in the disease-infested suburban slums of Ikeja and Mushin. The tribal violence quickly spread westward, engulfing Benin and Togo by mid-June. Within two weeks, riotous violence had turned into organized military action as Military Coalition of West African Governments peacekeeping forces, unpaid for months, were quickly bought off by one or the other of the opposing factions.

On 10 June, the United Nations passed an emergency resolution asking member nations to send immediate military assistance and humanitarian aid to the region. The U.S. Commander-in-Chief, Europe (CINCEUR), would command what would eventually become a 15-nation coalition. The U.S. contingent to the multinational force was designated as Joint Task Force 405.

The 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (special operations capable), stationed offshore on forward-deployment since late May, landed in the early morning of 12 June. (See figure.) Escorted by their organic short takeoff and vertical landing joint strike fighters (STOVL JSFs), the Marine Expeditionary Unit's (special operations capable) MV-22s transported

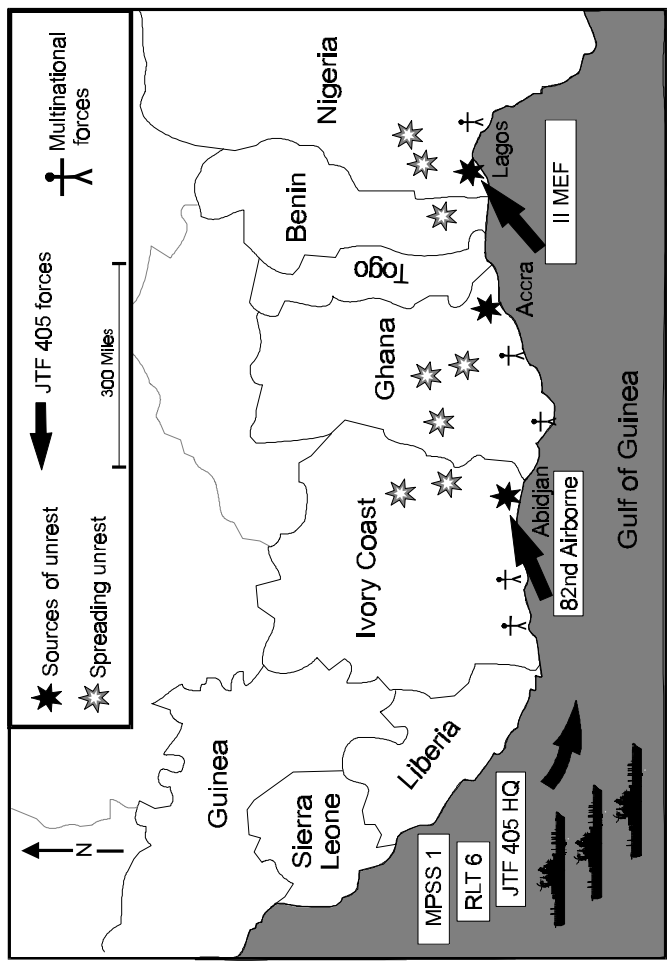


Lagos, June 2017.

Marine forces directly to objectives near Mushin and Ikeja, while surfaceborne elements moved by advanced amphibious assault vehicles (AAAV) and air-cushion landing craft (LCAC) through the narrow Lagos Harbor into Lagos Lagoon, bypassing the industrial city and landing instead near the campus of the University of Lagos, a hotbed of unrest. On the same day, a battalion of the French Foreign Legion deployed to Lagos by air but was diverted to Ilorin some 300 kilometers to the north until the Marine expeditionary unit could secure Lagos' Murtala Muhammed Airport the following day. After a week of continuous patrolling in the face of intermittent resistance, Marine and Foreign Legion forces restored some semblance of order to the northern suburbs of Lagos. Malaria was so pervasive that parts of the city had to be quarantined. Marines and Legionnaires were billeted aboard U.S. Navy ships and were ferried back and forth by MV-22.

Also on 12 June, Maritime Prepositioning Ships (MPS) Squadron 1, stationed in the Mediterranean, headed for the scene via the Strait of Gibraltar. The squadron included two newly commissioned enhanced maritime prepositioning ships designed to augment amphibious operations. (See figure.)

On 22 June the ready brigade of the 82d Airborne Division began to arrive by air at Abidjan, Ivory Coast, to perform humanitarian aid and peacekeeping missions. In late June and early July, forces from France, Great Britain, Italy, Angola, and South Africa began arriving at coastal cities to perform similar missions. On 26 June, Regimental Landing Team 2 and



Force deployment, Summer 2017.

other elements of II Marine Expeditionary Force deployed by amphibious shipping from North Carolina. Meanwhile, Regimental Landing Team 6 deployed by commercial and military airlift to Douala, Cameroon, to link up by MV-22 with MPS Squadron 1. The II Marine Expeditionary Force commenced peacemaking and peacekeeping operations in Lagos in early July, absorbing the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (special operations capable). Using decentralized tactics developed over the previous two decades, the Marines systematically cleared the cramped urban terrain of resistance through aggressive patrolling and a series of isolated small-unit combined-arms actions.

Joining Joint Task Force 405 from the United States were an aviation logistics support ship to provide sea-based aviation support and a hospital ship to provide a floating disease treatment center. Digitally connected to disease specialists in the United States, medical personnel afloat were eventually able to get the epidemic under control by autumn.

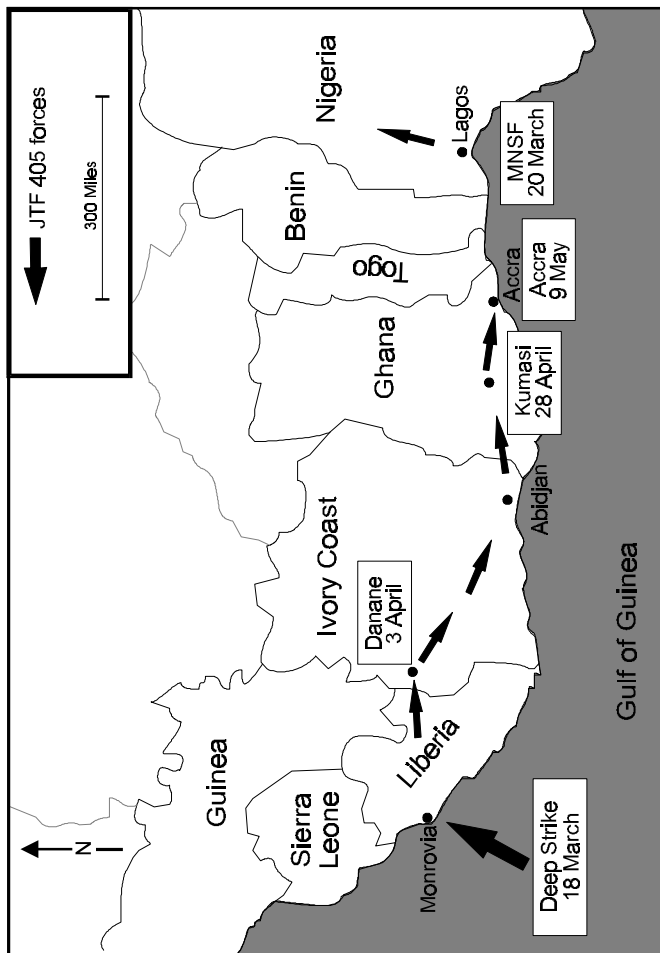
Meanwhile, various groups took advantage of the unrest to advance their own interests. On 29 June, Muslim-backed forces fighting for the People's Dahomian Nation (PDN) shelled Accra, Ghana, as fighting continued westward. Fighting also began to move inland as opposing armies fought for control of Nigerian and Ghanaian oil and mineral fields. Abidjan was overrun by refugees fleeing the fighting, and the city nearly doubled in population, to nearly three million, in the span of a month.

Overwhelmed by starvation and disease, Abidjan quickly became a disaster area.

One of the greatest threats to expeditionary forces ashore was malaria which threatened the operational effectiveness of several units, including one Italian battalion that suffered 40 percent casualties due to the disease. Reports of anthrax usage by the warring factions in several cities could not be confirmed because some urban areas were essentially inaccessible. A more common threat to United Nations forces was the use of “Lagos smokers,” crude chemical devices that upon impact produced toxic fumes by mixing potassium cyanide with acid. Delivered by hand or by rocket, these simple but effective weapons could produce mass casualties and could leave an area uninhabitable for days. Initially, these were employed primarily against civilian populations, but soon they were used increasingly against United Nations forces and facilities by both Muslim and Christian factions. By mid-August, Marine patrols were routinely operating in protective gear, and that same month, the chemical-biological incident response team from Marine Corps Forces Atlantic deployed to Lagos. Due to the chemical threat, several United Nations positions ashore became untenable and had to be withdrawn in August and September to ships of MPS Squadron 1, which thereafter provided permanent sea bases and billeting for several United Nations units. In September, MPS Squadron 2 deployed from Diego Garcia via the Cape of Good Hope to provide additional sea-basing support for U.S. and United Nations forces.

In August the westward expansion of fighting had halted east of Abidjan, now held in force by the 82d Airborne Division. The war entered a positional phase which lasted for the next 6 months as Muslim and Christian forces regularly launched rocket and artillery attacks against each other, civilian populations, and occasionally United Nations forces. By late September, some relief organizations estimated total casualties due to military action and disease at over 750,000. On 21 September, with organized violence on the rise again, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution expanding the charter of coalition forces, authorizing them to use military force to disarm any military or paramilitary forces in the field. Over the next 4 months the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (special operations capable), designed as the Joint Task Force 405 amphibious strike force, conducted six amphibious raids against Muslim or Christian positions in the Ivory Coast to a range of up to 250 kilometers inland.

In March 2018, the course of the war changed dramatically when the National Liberian People's Front (NLPF), out of power some 15 years, launched a successful coup in Monrovia, Liberia, supported by units from the army of Sierra Leone. (See figure.) The coup was coordinated with a renewed offensive by the PDN that threatened to eliminate organized Christian opposition in Ghana and Nigeria. The NLPF and PDN followed the coup in Liberia with a campaign of genocide aimed at Christian and animist tribes in Liberia, Ghana, and Nigeria.



In mid-March, the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (special operations capable) was designated Special Purpose MAGTF Deep Strike and was reinforced with the 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance (LAR) Battalion (already deployed to Lagos), 1st LAR Battalion (deploying by air from Camp Pendleton, California, to link up with selected ships of MPS Squadrons 1 and 2), and a squadron of attack helicopters with organic ground aviation support. The ground combat element came ashore at Monrovia from maritime prepositioning and amphibious ships on 18 March, met sporadic resistance, and struck immediately inland against the NLPF and PDN. Two days later a French-led Multinational Strike Force struck from the United Nations lodgment in Nigeria to destroy PDN forces in the field there.

In conjunction with air strikes and MV-22 attacks against targets in the enemy rear, the light armor battalions of Deep Strike drove inland under orders “to defeat NLPF forces and stop the tribal slaughter.” MAGTF fixed- and rotary wing aviation assets conducted urban offensive air support throughout the area of operations. Dense civilian populations made target discrimination difficult, but accurate overhead imagery provided by organic unmanned aerial vehicles and low-yield precision-guided munitions fired by fixed- and rotary wing assets greatly reduced that problem. After continuous skirmishing, the decisive battle occurred outside Danane, Ivory Coast, on 3 April, and remaining NLPF forces surrendered near Daloa on 11 April. The Deep Strike ground forces continued on to Abidjan, linking up with the 82nd Airborne and their own sea-based support on 13 April. On 20 April, the replenished ground combat element struck inland again, this time against

PDN forces in the Ivory Coast and Ghana, reaching Kumasi on 28 April and the Ghanian coast on the eastern outskirts of Accra on 9 May. Supported entirely from the sea by naval long-range fires, STOVL JSFs, MV-22s, and other assault support aircraft, Special Purpose MAGTF Deep Strike ground units had maneuvered some 1,400 kilometers in the 6-week operation. By this time the Multinational Strike Force had defeated PDN forces in Nigeria and advanced as far west as Cotonou, Benin. On 10 May, the U.S. Commander-in-Chief, Europe, ordered offensive operations halted, putting an end to major military operations in the war, although peacekeeping and humanitarian aid operations continued.

The special purpose MAGTF deployed home in late May, followed by II Marine Expeditionary Force. Starting with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (special operations capable) in early June, a forward-deployed Marine expeditionary unit remained nearby for the next 18 months. With the situation ashore stabilized, and under the protection of a permanent United Nations observation force, relief organizations began returning in the early summer of 2018.

CONCLUSION

In addition to illustrating future operational maneuver from the sea, this fictional case study also shows the key implementing concepts of ship-to-objective maneuver, maritime

prepositioning, and sea basing in a chaotic littoral environment. Landing forces use enhanced tactical and operational mobility to avoid enemy defenses and maneuver directly against operational objectives without first establishing a beachhead. Maritime prepositioning forces, using at-sea arrival and assembly capabilities, are integrated into the amphibious task force. Landing forces sustained and supported from the sea enjoy increased freedom of action by eliminating the need to establish and protect a large support base ashore.