

The Maneuver Enhancement Brigade

By Colonel Charles A. Williams and Mr. Joe Crider

“The Army is in the midst of a transformation process to move it to modularity—by adopting the six war-fighting functions and creating new and special organizations. One of those new and special organizations is the MEB [maneuver enhancement brigade]... designed as a C2 [command and control] headquarters with a robust multifunctional brigade staff that is optimized to conduct [maneuver support] operations. Maneuver support operations integrate the complementary and reinforcing capabilities of key protection, movement and maneuver, and sustainment functions, tasks, and systems to enhance freedom of action.”

—Field Manual (FM) 3-90.31

This article is intended to provide a basic understanding of the capabilities and doctrine of the MEB and its role in the modular Army. It offers a basic description of its unique capabilities, relevance to the current force,¹ and importance to the U.S. Army Maneuver Support Center (MANSCEN).

The roots of the MEB can be traced to the Army’s transformation initiatives, where modularity was identified as one of the primary goals. The goal in developing modular units was to serve the specific needs of combatant commanders by providing tailored forces² to support full spectrum operations. The Army’s leaders envisioned modularity as a bridge linking current capability requirements with those anticipated for the future. This strategy culminated in the Army’s decision to limit its brigade force structure to the following five distinct types:

- Infantry brigade combat teams.
- Heavy brigade combat teams.
- Stryker brigade combat teams.
- Functional brigades.
- Multifunctional brigades.

The MEB is the only one of five multifunctional brigades designed to manage terrain—a capability it shares with the brigade combat teams (BCTs).

With no antecedents, the MEB represents a unique—and at times somewhat misunderstood—organization. It is a dynamic, multifunctional organization predicated entirely on tailored forces that are task-organized for a specific objective. In many ways, it is an organization like no other, offering a tremendous variety of functional and technical depth coupled with significant lethality. The MEB delivers critical complementary and reinforcing capabilities in a flexible and scalable manner essential to conducting full spectrum operations. Included in these capabilities is the capacity to deliver any combination of lethal and nonlethal effects.

The critical missions or key tasks of MEBs include maneuver support, consequence management, stability, and support area operations. A common thread among each of

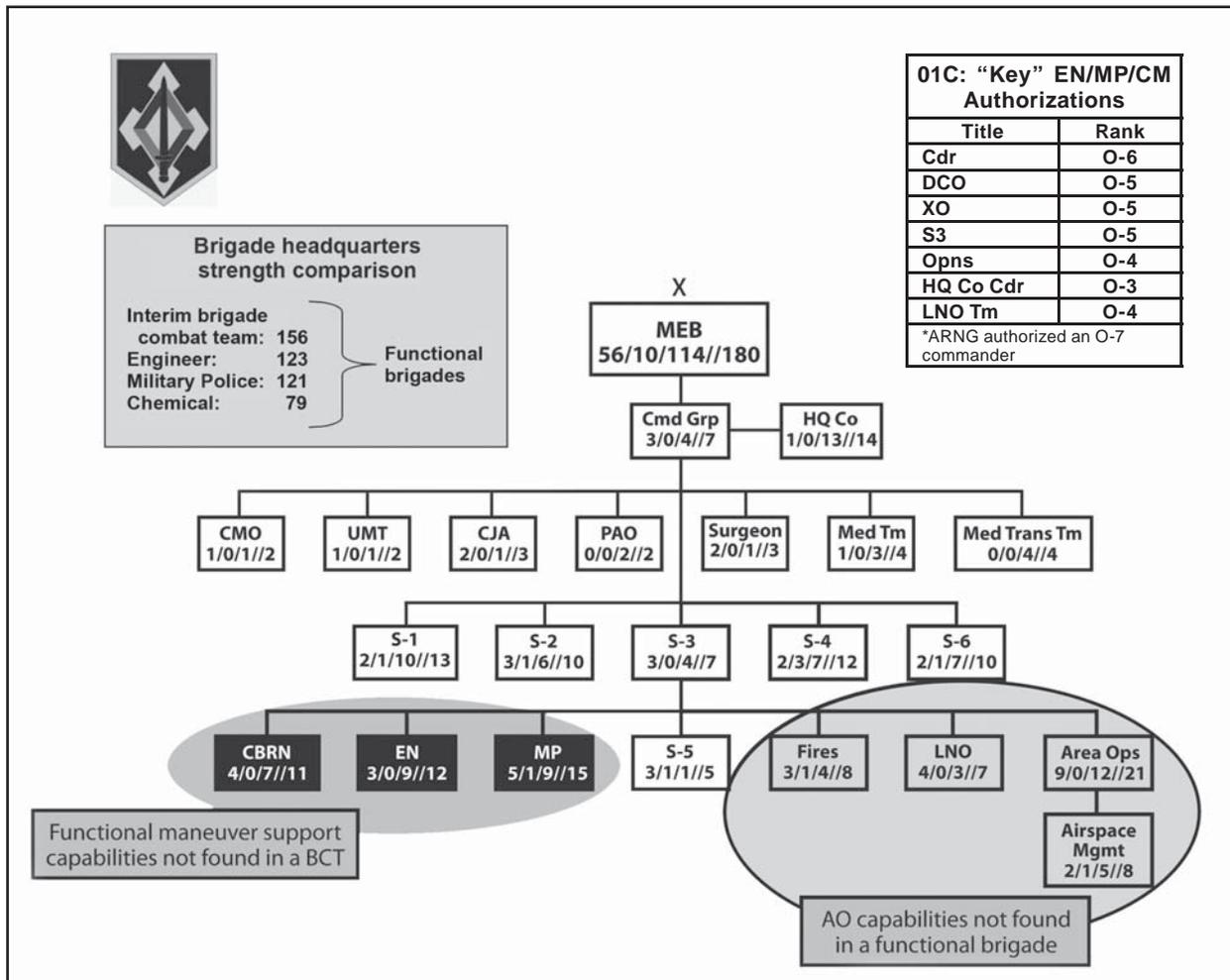
these missions is the obvious capability requirements of the MANSCEN proponents—chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN); engineer; and military police.

MEB Headquarters

Of particular significance to MANSCEN proponents and stakeholders is the robust MEB headquarters design. Currently numbering nearly 200 Soldiers, noncommissioned officers, warrant officers, and commissioned officers, the MEB headquarters is among the largest in the Army’s brigade inventory. Most of these coded authorizations specifically require CBRN, engineer, and military police personnel. To further extend MEB utility, force developers included authorizations for several other functions—such as fire support coordination and air space management—that lend the unique planning and execution capabilities necessary to support an area of operations (AO). The robust planning and C2 capabilities organic to the MEB headquarters serve as its primary attributes, making it ideal for complex missions requiring a flexible response and scalable effects along the spectrum of conflict. For example, the MEB may conduct missions that range from supporting host nation police or civil engineering to supporting a division conducting a deliberate river crossing. The relevance and potential of the MEB continues to evolve, particularly in the realm of support to civil operations as evidenced recently in the requirement for the MEB to provide support to a chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosives (CBRNE) consequence management response force.

Organization

The central purpose of the MEB is to provide tailored support to the modular division and corps (supported force) to meet the wide-ranging requirements of full spectrum operations. The MEB maintains a robust headquarters design composed of multiple coordinating and special staff cells. Included in the headquarters is a broad range of functional expertise that enables the commander to optimize his capabilities and tailor his response.



MEB staff organization

These cells provide the MEB with unique capabilities such as the—

- *Fire support element cell.* This cell provides indirect fire coordination (tube, rocket, or rotary-wing); enables the commander to extend protection throughout the support AO; and enables the mitigation of a host of threats, including support to a tactical combat force (TCF) (when assigned) for a Level III threat.
- *Liaison officer (LNO) cell.* With permanently assigned LNO personnel, this cell coordinates and establishes liaison vertically with senior and subordinate commands and horizontally with joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational or other agencies located in its AO.
- *Area operations cell.* This cell provides the commander with added flexibility on planning and coordinating activities related to terrain management without distracting the operations and training cell or civil-affairs cell from their primary focus.
- *Airspace management cell.* This cell coordinates air operations during support area operations or when the MEB is assigned an AO.

The “01C Initiative” is an approved special-reporting code that designates seven key positions within the MEB—commander, deputy brigade commander, executive officer, training officer, operations officer, headquarters company commander, and LNO team chief—to be filled by CBRN, engineer, or military police officers. The rationale for this initiative extends from the understanding that most of the MEB capabilities involve maneuver support. Limiting these billets to CBRN, engineer, and military police officers is a way to ensure technical and functional expertise within the seven most critical command and senior staff positions.

Beyond the headquarters nucleus, the MEB is a task-organized unit that is tailored to meet a specific mission requirement. To ensure flexibility, the designers of the MEB structure limited its organic composition to a headquarters, headquarters company, network support company, and brigade support battalion. Though dependent on mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available, and civilian considerations (METT-TC), a typical MEB task organization would likely include CBRN, engineer, military police, and explosive ordnance disposal

assets. Also based on METT-TC, it could include air defense artillery, civil affairs, and a TCF.³

Doctrine

The major tenets of FM 3-90.31 include the following:

- *Maneuver support operations.* These operations integrate the complementary and reinforcing capabilities of key protection; movement and maneuver; and sustainment functions, tasks, and systems to enhance freedom of action. For example, these key tasks may include area security, mobility, and internment and resettlement operations. Maneuver support operations occur throughout the operations process of planning, preparing, executing, and assessing. The MEB conducts maneuver support operations and integrates and synchronizes them across all Army warfighting functions in support of offensive and defensive operations and in the conduct or support of stability operations or civil support operations.⁴
- *Combined arms operations.* The MEB is a combined-arms organization that is task-organized based on mission requirements. The MEB is primarily designed to support divisions in conducting full spectrum operations. It can also support operations at echelons above division (EAD), including corps, theater, Army, joint, and multinational C2 structures. Still further, it is ideally suited to respond to state and federal agencies in conducting civil support operations in the continental United States. The MEB has limited offensive and defensive capabilities in leveraging its TCF (when assigned) to mitigate threats within its AO.⁵
- *Support area operations.* The MEB conducts support operations within the echelon support area to assist the supported headquarters in retaining freedom of action within the areas not assigned to maneuver units. When conducting support area operations, the MEB is in the defense, regardless of the form of maneuver or the major operation of the higher echelon. Support area operations need to—
 - Prevent or minimize interference with C2 and support operations.
 - Provide unimpeded movement of friendly forces.
 - Provide protection.
 - Find, fix, and destroy enemy forces or defeat threats.
 - Provide area damage control.⁶
- *Terrain management (conducted in the support area).* Tailored capabilities enable the MEB to assume many of the missions formerly performed by an assortment of organizations in the division and corps rear, such as rear area operations and base and base cluster security. Usually assigned its own AO to perform most of its missions, the MEB can also perform missions outside its AO. Normally, the MEB AO is the same as the supported echelon's support area. Within its AO, the

What the MEB Is

- The MEB is designed as a unique, multifunctional, C2 headquarters to perform maneuver support, consequence management, stability operations, and support area operations for the supported force—normally the division.
- The MEB is a bridge across the capability gap between the more capable functional brigades and the limited functional units such as CBRN, engineer, and military police of the BCTs. This headquarters provides greater functional staff capability than BCTs, but usually with less than a functional brigade. The key difference between the MEB and the functional brigades is the breadth and depth of the MEB multifunctional staff. The MEB provides complementary and reinforcing capabilities. The MEB staff bridges the planning capabilities between a BCT and the functional brigades.
- The MEB is an “economy of force” provider that allows BCTs and maneuver units to focus on combat operations. It directly supports and synchronizes operations across all six Army warfighting functions. For example, economy-of-force missions might involve support to counterinsurgency or other “terrain owner” missions. The MEB serves a vital economy-of-force role by freeing the BCT to concentrate on its priorities when adequately sourced with maneuver formations and other capabilities such as intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; fires; information operations; and medical operations.
- The MEB is similar to a BCT, but without the maneuver capability, providing C2 for an assigned AO—unlike other support or functional brigades. Unique staff cells such as area operations, fires, air space, and LNO assets provide the MEB with a level of expertise in area-of-responsibility and terrain management that is uncommon in a functional brigade.
- The MEB is capable of supporting divisions and EAD.
- The MEB can conduct combat operations at the maneuver battalion level when task-organized with a TCF or other maneuver forces.

MEB can perform a host of missions, though it is better suited to perform one or two missions simultaneously than several at the same time. Some of the missions assigned to an MEB within its AO include movement control; recovery; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; and stability operations. The MEB defends the assets within its AO, including bases and

What the MEB Is Not

- The MEB is not a maneuver brigade, but is normally assigned an AO with control of terrain. The main maneuver is defensive, with very limited offensive maneuvers when its reserve (response force or TCF) is employed to counter or spoil the threat. When the situation requires, the MEB executes limited offensive and defensive operations, using response forces or TCF against Level II and III threats.
- The MEB is not composed mainly of organic assets, but rather a tailored set of units.
- The MEB is not typically as maneuverable as a brigade. It is designed to be assigned an AO and C2, with higher headquarters assigned tactical control for the security of tenant units.
- The MEB is not designed to conduct screen, guard, or cover operations, which are usually assigned to BCTs.
- The MEB is not a replacement for functional brigades, especially at EAD.
- The MEB is not a replacement for functional brigades for missions such as counter CBRNE weapons and threats across the entire operational area; major complex CBRNE or weapons of mass destruction–elimination operations; major focused combat or general engineering operations; brigade level internment/resettlement operations; major integrated military police operations (each involving three or more battalions); or missions requiring increased functional capabilities and staff support or exceeding the C2 focus of the MEB.
- The MEB is not replaceable by a CBRN, engineer, or military police brigade to perform other functional missions within its own AO or at other selected locations within the division AO.
- The MEB is not a replacement for unit self-defense responsibilities.

base clusters. Outside of its AO, the MEB can provide military police, explosive ordnance disposal, or CBRN support to the supported commander.⁷

- *Movement corridors.* One of the ways that the MEB performs protection missions is by establishing movement corridors to protect the movement of personnel and vehicles. The MEB provides route security and reconnaissance and defends lines of communication. (The figure on page 25 offers an

overview of MEB mission capabilities, depicting core capability mission-essential tasks and the supporting task groups.)

- *Interdependencies.* The MEB, like all other modular brigade structures, relies on others for some of its support. When needed, the MEB must leverage fire, medical, aviation, and intelligence support from adjacent functional or multifunctional brigades. As the likely landowner of the support area, the MEB provides support throughout the division area of responsibility and to the other modular support brigades residing within the support area as part of its support area operations mission.

MEB Limitations

The MEB is not a maneuver organization. Although it harnesses sufficient C2 and battle staff personnel to employ a TCF in a limited role (when assigned), it does not seize terrain and it does not seek out a Level III threat. It is important that MEB commanders and staffs clearly articulate the differences between the MEB, the other modular support brigades, the functional brigades, and the BCTs.

The Way Ahead

The future of the MEB appears very positive. Its capabilities are relevant and indispensable to combatant commanders conducting full spectrum operations. The MEB receives frequent accolades from an expanding chorus of general officers. Just recently, General William S. Wallace, then the commanding general of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), and Major General Walter Wojdakowski, Chief of Infantry and commander of the Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Benning, Georgia, strongly supported the need for more MEBs. Their belief is that the current and future operational environments—increasingly asymmetrical and complex—require more MEBs. In sharing their experiences from the major combat operation phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom, they remarked that an MEB or two could have played a key role during the march to Baghdad. Their assessment was that the MEB is uniquely configured to C2 all the maneuver support capabilities required to support Army operations. During the early phases of Operation Iraqi Freedom, all critical maneuver support functions now resident in MEBs were managed in composite fashion. Most frequently, functional or maneuver brigades would assume these functions as an additional mission. Performing these vital missions was necessary in ensuring that the lines of communication remained open and that the rear area remained secure. Typically, units performed maneuver support operations and support area operations missions as a secondary effort, diverting their focus from their primary mission—the march to Baghdad.

The unique design of the MEB ensures its place in the Army's force structure to provide maneuver support to divisions and corps for years to come. A central concept of the modular force is for each of the modular support brigades to provide seamless support to the supported commander. For the MEB,

(continued on page 31)

So, someone like Ivins represents the most likely threat from a biolab. Any scientist secretly plotting with terrorists is unlikely to be as successful as Ivins allegedly was at concealing it. He would need to be able to communicate and coordinate with radical jihadists in the United States or abroad without arousing suspicion. He would also need to hide any financial arrangements with the terrorists from his colleagues and law enforcement personnel. Furthermore, knowing the devastation it would reap on his fellow citizens, it would be necessary for any scientist who was willing to unleash a large-scale biological attack on a major U.S. city to be immensely dedicated to the terrorist cause. It is unlikely that a senior level scientist could be that committed to a radical agenda without giving away some fairly obvious warning signs.

While it may be unlikely that a scientist will work with al-Qaida or some other terrorist group, the possibility should not be completely dismissed. It is possible for a senior level biological scientist to undergo a radical ideological conversion and simply decide to take actions that would have previously been unthinkable. It is also possible for colleagues and lower-level employees, through ignorance or fear of confrontation, to ignore warning signs. Nevertheless, the most pressing fear facing Americans is that of a rogue scientist in the model of Ivins.

The law enforcement and the scientific communities must create tough, comprehensive standards for regulating the burgeoning biolab industry. Only by confronting this problem can Americans feel safer about the possibility of being attacked by their own biological creations. ●●●

Endnotes

¹Glenn Greenwald, "Vital Unresolved Anthrax Questions and ABC News," *Salon*, 1 August 2008.

²"Experts Disagree Over Anthrax Attacks' Origin," *USA Today*, 5 December 2001.

(*The Maneuver Enhancement Brigade*" continued from page 27)

the tailored design ensures that it can provide all essential maneuver support functions to the supported commander. While the MEB is only one part of a division force package, it is required to ensure seamless support to the division across the spectrum of conflict. There are twenty-three MEBs planned for the total force—four in the Active Army, three in the U.S. Army Reserve, and sixteen in the Army National Guard. We began to activate MEBs in 2006 and will continue to activate them through 2012. So far, fourteen MEBs have been activated and several have already deployed.

The MANSCEN challenge now is to develop a culture of leaders who can visualize, describe, and direct the many capabilities resident in the MEB to support a transforming Army. ●●●

Endnotes:

¹"Our Army at War: Relevant and Ready," *Soldiers Magazine*, January 2004.

³William J. Broad, "A Nation Challenged: The Spores; Contradicting Some U.S. Officials, 3 Scientists Call Anthrax Powder High-Grade," *The New York Times*, 25 October 2001.

⁴Scott Shane and Eric Lichtblau, "Scientist's Suicide Linked to Anthrax Inquiry," *The New York Times*, 2 August 2008.

⁵Scott Shane, "Portrait Emerges of Anthrax Suspect's Troubled Life," *The New York Times*, 3 January 2009.

⁶Shane and Lichtblau, 2 August 2008.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Emily Ramshaw, "Boom in Biodefense Labs Sparks Security Debate," *Dallas Morning News*, 26 October 2007.

⁹Ken Stier, "How Safe Are Our Bio Labs?" *Time*, 5 October 2007.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ramshaw, 26 October 2007.

¹⁴Stier, 5 October 2007.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ramshaw, 26 October 2007.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Larry Margasak and David Dishneau, "Is Another Bruce Ivins Lurking in a Biolab?" *Guardian*, 3 August 2008.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Henry C. Kelley, "Terrorism and the Biology Lab," *The New York Times*, 2 July 2003.

²²Shane and Lichtblau, 2 August 2008.

²³Ibid.

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²Field Manual Interim (FMI) 3-0.1, *The Modular Force*, 28 January 2008.

³FM 3-90.31, *Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Operations*, 26 February 2009.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

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