

# 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 warfighting 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.”<sup>1</sup>*

—Field Manual (FM) 3-90.31, Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Operations

The intent of this article is to provide a basic understanding of the capabilities and doctrine of the maneuver enhancement brigade (MEB) and its role in the modular Army. It offers a basic description of the MEB’s unique capabilities, relevance to the current force,<sup>2</sup> and importance to the United States Army Maneuver Support Center (MANSCEN).

The evolution of the MEB traces its roots to the Army’s transformation initiatives, which identified modularity as one of its primary goals. The Army’s goal in developing modular units was to serve the specific needs of combatant commanders by providing tailored forces<sup>3</sup> 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 (IBCTs)
- Heavy brigade combat teams (HBCTs)
- Stryker brigade combat teams (SBCTs)
- Functional brigades
- Multifunctional brigades

As one of five multifunctional brigades, the MEB is the only one 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 and multifunctional organization, predicated entirely on tailored forces 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 that is essential to conducting full spectrum operations. Included in these capabilities is the capacity to deliver any combination of lethal and nonlethal effects.

The MEB’s critical missions or key tasks include maneuver support operations, consequence management operations, stability operations, and support area operations.

A common thread among each of these missions is the obvious capability requirements of MANSCEN’s three proponents—chemical, engineer, and military police.

## What the MEB Is

- The MEB is designed as a unique multifunctional command and control (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 chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (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’s 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 (ISR); fires; information operations; and medical operations.
- The MEB is similar to a BCT, without the BCT’s maneuver capability, providing C2 for an assigned area of operations, unlike other support or functional brigades. Unique staff cells such as area operations, fires, air space, and liaison officer (LNO) assets give the MEB a level of expertise in area of responsibility and terrain management uncommon in a functional brigade.
- The MEB is capable of supporting divisions and echelon-above-division (EAD) organizations as well.

- The MEB is able to conduct combat operations up to the level of a maneuver battalion when task-organized with a tactical combat force (TCF) or other maneuver forces.

### What the MEB Is Not

- The MEB is not a maneuver brigade but is normally assigned an area of operation (AO) and given control of terrain. The MEB's only maneuver is defensive, with very limited offensive maneuver when it employs its reserve (response force or TCF) to counter or spoil threat. When the situation requires, the MEB executes limited offensive and defensive operations, using response forces or TCF against Level II or III threats.
- The MEB is not mainly composed of organic assets, but rather a tailored set of units.
- The MEB is not typically as maneuverable as a brigade. Instead, it is designed to be assigned an AO and C2 with higher headquarters-assigned tactical control for security of tenant units.
- The MEB is not designed to conduct screen, guard, and cover operations, which are usually assigned to BCTs.
- The MEB is not a replacement for the functional brigades, especially at EAD.
- The MEB is not a replacement for functional brigades for missions such as counter chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosive (CBRNE) weapons and threats across the entire operational area; major complex CBRNE or WMD-elimination operations; major focused combat and/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.

### MEB Headquarters

Of particular significance to MANSCEN proponents and stakeholders is the MEB's robust 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. The majority of these coded authorizations specifically require chemical, engineer, and military police personnel. To further extend its utility, force developers included authorizations for several other functions—such as fire support coordination and air space management—that lend the MEB unique planning and execution capabilities necessary to support its own 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 ranging from support such as police or civil engineering to a host nation to support to 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 CBRNE consequence management response force (CCMRF).

### Organization

The MEB's central purpose is to provide tailored support to the modular division and corps (supported force) in order to meet wide-ranging requirements in support of full spectrum operations. To support this need, 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 (see figure on page 28).

These cells provide the MEB with unique capabilities such as the following:

- *Fires Cell.* Provides indirect fire coordination (tube, rocket, rotary-wing, or close air support [CAS]); enables the commander to extend protection throughout the support AO; enables mitigation of a host of threats, including support to a TCF (when assigned) in mitigating a Level III threat.
- *LNO Cell.* With permanently assigned LNO personnel, coordinates and establishes liaison vertically with senior and subordinate commands and horizontally with joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) or other agencies located in its AO.
- *Area Operations Cell.* Provides the commander with added flexibility on planning and coordinating activities related to terrain management, while not distracting the operations and training cell or civil affairs cell from its primary focus.
- *Airspace Management 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—commander, deputy brigade commander, executive officer, training officer, operations officer, headquarters company commander, and LNO team chief—within the MEB to be filled by chemical, engineer, or military police officers. The rationale for this initiative extends from the understanding that the majority of the MEB's capabilities involve maneuver support. Limiting these billets to chemical, engineer, and military police officers is a way to assure technical and functional expertise within the seven most critical command and senior staff positions (see figure on page 10).

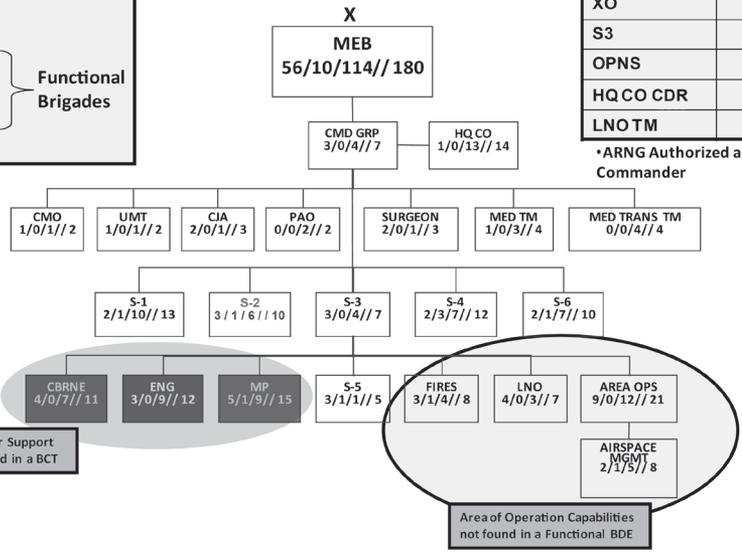
Beyond the headquarters nucleus, the MEB is a task-organized unit tailored to meet a specific mission requirement. To ensure flexibility, the designers of the MEB structure limited its organic composition to a headquarters, a headquarters company, a network support company, and a brigade support battalion. Though mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available, and civil considerations (METT-TC)-dependent, a typical MEB task organization would likely include chemical, engineer, military police, and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) assets. Also based on METT-TC, it could include air defense artillery, civil affairs, and a TCF.<sup>4</sup>

# Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Staff Organization



BDE HQ Strength Comparison	
IBCT: 156	} Functional Brigades
EN: 123	
MP: 121	
CM: 79	

O 1 C: "Key" EN/MP/CM Authorizations	
Title	Rank
CDR	06
DCO	05
XO	05
S3	05
OPNS	04
HQCO CDR	03
LNO TM	04



\*ARNG Authorized an O7 Commander

## 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 the Army warfighting functions in support of offensive and defensive operations and in the conduct or support of stability operations or civil support operations.<sup>5</sup>
- **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 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.<sup>6</sup>
- **Support Area Operations.** The MEB conducts support operations within the echelon support area to assist the

supported headquarters to retain 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 include the need to—

- ▶ Prevent or minimize interference with C2 and support operations.
  - ▶ Provide unimpeded movement of friendly forces.
  - ▶ Provide protection.
  - ▶ Conduct operations to find, fix, and destroy enemy forces or defeat threats.
  - ▶ Provide area damage control.<sup>7</sup>
- **Terrain Management (conducted in the support area).** The MEB's tailored capabilities enable it 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's AO is the same as the supported echelon's support area. Within its AO, the 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; ISR; and stability operations. The MEB defends the assets within its AO, including bases and base clusters. Outside of its AO, the MEB can provide military police, EOD, or CBRN support to the supported commander.<sup>8</sup>

- *Movement Corridors.* One of the ways that the MEB performs protection missions is by establishing movement corridors to protect movement of personnel and vehicles. The MEB provides route security and reconnaissance and defends lines of communication. The figure on page 10 offers a greater overview of the MEB's mission capabilities, depicting its core capability mission-essential tasks (CCMETs) and the supporting task groups.
- *Interdependencies.* The MEB, like all the 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 will not only have to provide support throughout the division area of responsibility but also 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 staff can 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 commanding general of the United States Army Training and Doctrine Command, 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 command and control all the maneuver support capabilities required to support Army operations. During the early phases of Operation Iraqi Freedom, all the 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 to ensuring that the lines of communication remained open and the rear area remained secure. Typically, units performed maneuver support operations and support area operations missions as a secondary effort, taking their focus away from their primary mission—the march to Baghdad.

The MEB's unique design ensures its place in the Army's force structure to provide maneuver support to division and

corps for the current force and 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 its part, the MEB's tailored design assures 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 too is required to ensure seamless support to the division across the spectrum of conflict. At present, there are 23 MEBs in the total force—4 in the Active Army, 3 in the United States Army Reserve, and 16 in the Army National Guard. We began to activate MEBs in 2006 and will continue to activate them through 2012. Currently, 14 MEBs have been activated and several have already deployed.

The MANSZEN 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.



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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>FM 3-90.31, *Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Operations* (Introduction), 26 February 2009.

<sup>2</sup>“Our Army at War: Relevant and Ready,” *Soldiers Magazine*, January 2004.

<sup>3</sup>Field Manual Interim (FMI) 3-0.1, *The Modular Force*, 28 January 2008.

<sup>4</sup>FM 3-90.31.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

A similar version of this article was published in the *Maneuver Support Magazine*, Winter 2009.