

EXU-1, Marines, NSWC Indian Head Team Up for Joint Forces



Ships participating in BALTOPS, the Baltic Operation Exercise. *ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY / Sailor First Class Bryan Underwood*
INDIAN HEAD, Md. – When the Navy’s Expeditionary Exploitation Unit-1 (EXU-1) teamed up with the U.S. Marine Corps’ Littoral Explosive Ordnance Neutralization (LEON) group for the first joint evolution with Marine explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) operators, they received some unexpected help from the Naval Surface Warfare Center Indian Head Division’s (NSWC IHD) Energetics Manufacturing (M) Department, the NSWC IHD said in a release.

Due to the inherent mission of EXU-1 and their expertise in expeditionary exploitation, the Marine Corps saw an opportunity to bolster that capability with the innate ordnance disassembly and inerting capability used by Marines for ordnance exploitation.

“Recognizing these complimentary capabilities, and the need for naval integration to succeed in the power competition, we devised an internal exercise to demonstrate the utility in Marines augmenting EXU-1,” said Master Gunnery Sgt. Jamie Lee, the EOD chief for the Marine Corps Detachment at NSWC IHD. “As this plan developed, additional opportunities with the Energetics Manufacturing Department and LEON were presented, allowing the Navy-Marine Corps EOD team to execute on a larger scale with support from Marine Corps Base Quantico EOD.”

This ultimately led to continued integration and successful capability development at the recent Baltic Operations (BALTOPS) exercise: the annual maritime-focused U.S. European Command and U.S. Naval Forces Europe exercise in the Baltic region.

“Navy and Marine EOD units possess the core EOD capabilities necessary to support [Department of Defense] and service level mission essential tasks. We differ slightly in the service specific niche EOD capability development,” said Lee. “In this case, Marine EOD is unique amongst the services in their ordnance disassembly and inerting skillsets, to include the depth of information and reporting generated in a tactical/expeditionary environment. Augmenting the technical exploitation capability of EXU-1 with Marine Corps ordnance exploitation skillsets provides the ability for on-site ordnance exploitation and analysis for near real-time information to support the intelligence cycle.”

According to Greg Johnson, EXU-1’s foreign materiel director, what started out as a joint exercise between the LEON platoon and EXU-1 became an opportunity to gather unused ordnance to use as training aids thanks to the input and hard work from the department’s employees.

“We had a requirement we were working on which generated a relationship between the U.S. Marine Detachment (MARDET) and EXU-1 so we were looking to push our combined capabilities out to the field for the operators to integrate,” he said. “We were meeting with M Department personnel on a separate issue when the subject came up about them having excess ordnance they were planning on disposing.”

This joint initiative was the first time this was done to such a large scale, in a compact timeline to support multiple Navy and Marine Corps exercises. A large quantity of excess ordnance items including landmines, anti-tank and anti-personnel munitions, and shallow water mines were made inert by the MARDET operators for use as training aids and various exercises at Camp Pendleton, California. This evolution between the three groups occurred in approximately two months, resulting in quicker deployment of these training aids to the joint force EOD operator and at a significant cost savings as new material purchases were not required.

M Department personnel “were instrumental with logistics such as transportation of the ordnance to Quantico, inspection of the equipment and handling the paperwork,” said Johnson. “There was no work plan. They just jumped on board and fully supported us the entire time. They came in early, they stayed late, they did everything they could to help us accomplish the mission.”

According to Christopher Bruce, a supervisory technician with the department’s Explosives and Energetics Division, what originally happened as circumstance turned into an opportunity to provide the joint service warfighter with much-needed training aids quicker than anyone expected.

“A few meetings occurred and we discussed EXU-1’s needs and wants,” he said. “From there we began coordination with them directly to provide information into items they felt would help support their needs in training and exploitation.”

After several planning meetings, the department’s Explosives and Energetics Division and Magazine Logistical Support gathered the requested items and began inspections at the command’s Explosive Production Facilities to allow the ordnance to be safely shipped from NSWC IHD to various training sites. Once the inspections were complete, both divisions and EXU-1 collaborated to load multiple vehicles in just a few days to be transported off station to training sites.

“Our hope is that this collaboration is one of many. We want to continue to provide real-world items to the warfighter for training to help develop knowledge and understanding,” said Bruce. “I personally am extremely grateful for all the time and dedication from all members involved. So many hours of sacrifice for an urgent need and it all accumulated with a great outcome.”