

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-789](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The Navy and Marine Corps have identified a need to improve their ability to conduct amphibious operations—an operation launched from the sea by an amphibious force.

Senate and House reports accompanying bills for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 included provisions for GAO to review Navy and Marine Corps training. This report examines the extent to which (1) the Navy and Marine Corps have completed training for amphibious operations priorities and taken steps to mitigate any training shortfalls, (2) these services' efforts to improve naval integration for amphibious operations incorporate leading collaboration practices, and (3) the Marine Corps has integrated selected virtual training devices into operational training. GAO analyzed training initiatives; interviewed a nongeneralizable sample of officials from 23 units that were selected based on their training plans; analyzed training completion data; and selected a nongeneralizable sample of six virtual training devices to review based on factors such as target audience.

This is a public version of a classified report GAO issued in August 2017. Information that DOD deemed classified has been omitted.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Navy and Marine Corps develop an approach for amphibious operations training and define and articulate common outcomes for naval integration; and that the Marine Corps develop guidance for the development and use of its virtual training devices. The Department of Defense concurred.

View [GAO-17-789](#). For more information, contact Cary Russell at (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov.

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NAVY AND MARINE CORPS TRAINING

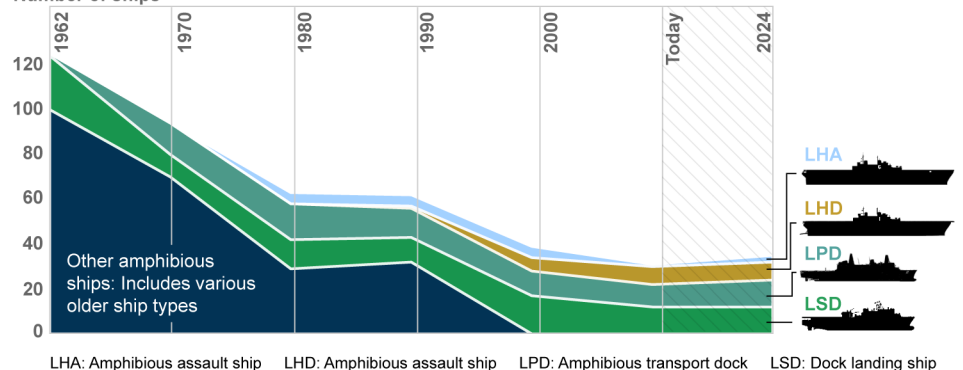
Further Planning Needed for Amphibious Operations Training

What GAO Found

Navy and Marine Corps units that are deploying as part of an Amphibious Ready Group and Marine Expeditionary Unit (ARG-MEU) completed their required training for amphibious operations, but other Marine Corps units have been limited in their ability to conduct training for other amphibious operations—related priorities. GAO found that several factors, to include the decline in the fleet of the Navy's amphibious ships from 62 in 1990 to 31 today limited the ability of Marine Corps units to conduct training for other priorities, such as recurring training for home-station units (see figure). As a result, training completion for amphibious operations was low for some but not all Marine Corps units from fiscal years 2014 through 2016. The services have taken steps to address amphibious training shortfalls, such as more comprehensively determining units that require training. However, these efforts are incomplete because the services do not have an approach to prioritize available training resources, evaluate training resource alternatives, and monitor progress towards achieving priorities. Thus, the services are not well positioned to mitigate any training shortfalls.

Trends in the Size of the Navy's Fleet of Amphibious Ships

Number of ships



LHA: Amphibious assault ship LHD: Amphibious assault ship LPD: Amphibious transport dock LSD: Dock landing ship

Source: GAO analysis of Marine Corps information. | GAO-17-789

The Navy and Marine Corps have taken some steps to improve coordination between the two services, but have not fully incorporated leading collaboration practices to improve integration of the two services—naval integration—for amphibious operations. For example, the Navy and Marine Corps have not defined and articulated common outcomes for naval integration that would help them align efforts to maximize training opportunities for amphibious operations.

The Marine Corps has taken steps to better integrate virtual training devices into operational training, but gaps remain in its process to develop and use them. GAO found that for selected virtual training devices, the Marine Corps did not conduct front-end analysis that considered key factors, such as the specific training tasks that a device would accomplish; consider device usage data to support its investment decisions; or evaluate the effectiveness of existing virtual training devices because of weaknesses in the service's guidance. As a result, the Marine Corps risks investing in devices that are not cost-effective and whose value to operational training is undetermined.