

Combat Service support MEU Commanders

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Introduction

No matter the source of a Marine Officer's commission, it is his potential to lead that begins his career in the Corps. But after a Marine receives his MOS, his potential or at least the perception of his ability to lead either increases—if he is a pilot or infantry officer or decreases if he earns a MOS outside of the combat arms arena. By the time a student at The Basic School (TBS) receives his MOS, he already knows, under the current system, whether or not he has the potential to become the Commandant of the Marine Corps, a combatant commander or a Marine Expeditionary Unit Commanding Officer (MEU CO). Because of their leadership ability, operational experience, and professional military education, combat service support (CSS) officer should be considered equally with their ground combat element (GCE) and aviation combat element (ACE) counterparts for command of a Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operation Capable) MEU (SOC).

Leadership Ability

The Marine Corps requires all of its officers to lead, but the trust that the Corps has in its officer's ability to lead seems to be disproportionate. There has never been a MEU Commander with a background in CSS. A young enlisted Marine, regardless of MOS, has the potential

to become a first Sergeant or sergeants Major in any unit, and possible the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps—but the same cannot be said for a lieutenant colonel or colonel in the CSS community.

The ability to lead is not exclusive to a particular MOS. Throughout every MOS there are Marine officers that are better leaders than others and there are also officers in every MOS with outstanding leadership skills. Because this is true, MEU commanders should be chosen from the best leaders throughout the MAGTF.

If the ability to lead major subordinate commanders is the first trait looked for in a MEU commander, then the ability to make a decision is a close second. At the MEU level, the commander has three command chosen subordinate leaders. A MEU Commander is expected to make decisions based on the information and recommendation made by his subordinate leaders and staff. An officer ability to make an informed decision is not based on his MOS. It is based in part on his operational experience and what he has been exposed to during his career.

Operational Experience

CSS officers are the groups of officer that serve in every component of the Marine Air Ground Task Force. Because of this experience, some CSS officers are exposed

to unique opportunity early on in their careers. For example, a mid grade captain may have already served two of the four elements of the MAGTF before attending his career level school. It is possible for the same captain to graduate from his career school and serve in another element of the MAGTF before becoming a major. Through this opportunity, a CSS officer has been exposed to the challenges of his job throughout the MAGTF. Along with having the opportunity of serving in multiple elements of the MAGTF in a single tour, CSS officers also have more opportunity to command than our GCE and ACE counterparts. No only does a CSS officer have more opportunity to command, he also has the opportunity to command in the FSSG, the Division and in the Air Wing—so why not in the command element of the MAGTF as a MEU command?

In recent years, reason for not making CSS officer MEU commander have ranged from (1) not having enough experience planning and coordinating fires, (2) not having the ability to order Marines to their death. Prior to the Global War on Terrorism, few officers at the tactical level had any experience at order Marine into harms way. Since the Global on Terrorism, CSS officers have gained invaluable experience. In Iraq and in Afghanistan, CSS officer have conducted patrolling and convoys operations—operations that

require close coordination of fires and requires unit leader to understand call for fire procedures.

Pilots serve as MEU commanders, and not all pilots who serve as MEU commanders have a lot of experience in fires. However, they do have a Battalion Landing Team Commander (BLT), and a Fire Support Officer (FSO) and a Battery commander. These same assets and expertise would be at the MEU commander's disposal regardless of what element of the MAGTF that he specializes. The ethos of the Marine Corps is "Every Marine a Rifleman." If this true, does every qualified Marine Officer, regardless of MOS, deserved to be considered for MEU command?

Professional Military Education

The CSS officer that would likely be competitive for MEU commander is one that has prepared himself through his career. He possesses the leadership needed. He has commanded. He has operational experience in nearly every component of the MAGTF and he has completed the same schools at the career, intermediate and top-level as his GCE and ACE counterparts have that he does not, but he is will not have the same opportunity to command at the MEU level.

In some cases, the only difference in his ability to lead at the MEU level is the fact that a Staff Platoon

Commander (SPC) at TBS did not think that he would make a good infantry officer. A Marine that goes to the Expeditionary Warfare School (EWS), the Command and Staff College and the War College have either volunteered or worked to get selected to these schools. Regardless of the MOS a Marine Officer earns at TBS, if he proves himself capable over the course of his career he should have the same opportunity to command at any level just as any other qualified Marine Officer. A colonel in the Marine Corps did not achieve that rank without knowing how to lead, without have significant operational experience, and without preparing himself intellectually through the Marine Corps' professional military education program.

It is the responsibility of a CSS officer to constantly prepare himself to be the MAGTF officer that he can possibly be. It is not good enough for CSS officer to be so specified that they can not function outside of there MOSs. Combat Service Support is only one function that a MAGTF is responsible for performing, therefore; a CSS officer should look at his job as only one quarter of what he is supposed to know. This is why schools outside the combat service support community, such as EWS, are vital to the CSS officer so that he can stay competitive with his peers.

Conclusion

As officers, we are taught to be MAGTF officer—that is to be well rounded in all elements of the MAGTF. In order to become a well rounded MAGTF officer, it takes leadership, operational experience, and a solid professional military education. In the past, for the most part war was symmetrical and there were distinct front and rear lines. It was the classic infantry upfront and suppliers in the rear. In today's Global War on Terrorism, there are no rear and front lines. CSS officers of every MOS are not only performing their MOS specific missions, they are also doing some of the same task of combat and combat support units. This is giving the future CSS colonels invaluable operational experience. No longer can the Marine Corps say that most of its gunfighters are pilots and infantry officers.

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