Engineers Temporarily Assigned to Marine Expeditionary Unit Combat Logistics Battalions

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> Operating forces should be organized for warfighting and then adapted for peacetime rather than vice versa. Tables of organization should reflect the two central requirements of *deployability* and the *ability to task-organize according to specific situations.* Units should be organized according to type only to the extent dictated by training, administrative, and logistic requirements.[1]

This excerpt from MCDP-1 provides a framework for the organization of the operating forces. Engineers in 2d Marine Logistics Battalion are being permanently assigned to the Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), Combat Logistics Battalions (CLBs), rather than being temporarily assigned for workups and deployment. The current situation is to assign engineers to the CLBs as if they were a permanent command and do not report back to their parent command at anytime. The MEU CLBs need to be organized for deployment and then adapted for peacetime. The 2d Marine Logistics Group (MLG) should revert to its previous practice of returning engineers to their parent commands upon completion of a deployment to alleviate imbalances in manning, equipment, and training.

Background

The MLG reorganization that took effect in December, 2005, had several implications on the engineer community, specifically

[1] Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication1, *Warfighting*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 20 June 1997, 55.

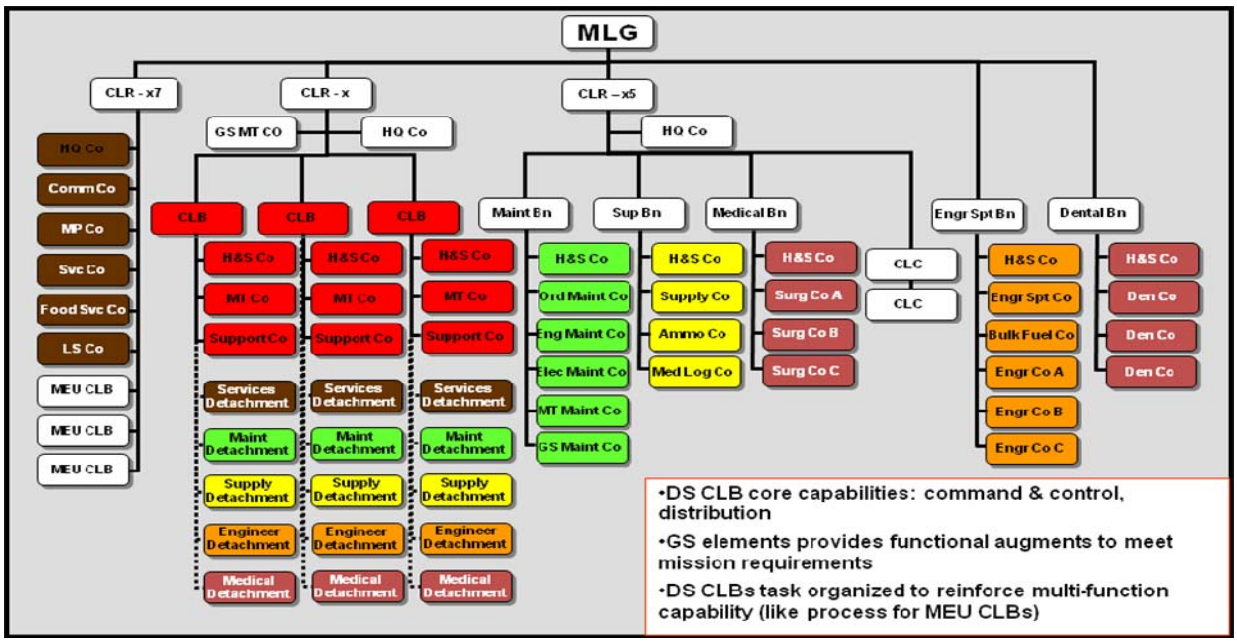
within the MEU CLBs.[2] Prior to the reorganization, engineers were sent to the MEU on a temporary basis for a period of approximately fourteen months. They would complete a six month workup cycle, deploy for six months, and then have two months upon returning from deployment to conduct inspections and take leave before returning to their parent command, 8th Engineer Support Battalion (ESB) in most cases. After the MLG reorganization, engineers, along with several other components of the CLB, were considered permanently assigned and did not return to their parent command at any point. Some personnel were sent directly to the CLB by the MLG administrative officer (G-1). However, their line numbers were still mapped back to the parent command.[3] This means that the line numbers filled by personnel sent to the MEU CLBs permanently degrades the readiness of the parent command, while the respective MEU is not formed. This is currently the practice in 2d MLG. 1st MLG and 3rd MLG have maintained the original practice of temporarily assigning personnel to the MEU and then releasing them to their parent commands after deployment.

The time period at question is between returning from deployment, when the CLB detaches from the MEU, and when the MEU reforms for the next deployment. During this period, in 2d MLG,

[2] Commandant of the Marine Corps. Marine Corps Administrative Message 576/05, "Logistics Combat Element (LCE) Reorganization Update and POAM." 5 December 2005.
[3] LtCol Mary Augustus, interview by Capt Carr, 16 Dec 2008.

the CLB is assigned to Combat Logistics Regiment 27 (CLR-27), also called the Forward CLR in accordance with the MLG reorganization.[4] During the six months that engineers are assigned to the CLR, they are disassociated from the MEU. This is the time that the components of the CLB should be returned to their parent commands to reconstitute their force and have the opportunity to conduct more specialized Marine Occupational Specialty (MOS) training. This is not happening in 2d MLG.

This problem only pertains to 2d MLG. Also, while Engineer concerns are specifically discussed, the larger issue is that the CLB exists at all while not attached to the MEU. This was not the intent of the reorganization as depicted in the diagram below.



Manning

[4] MLG reorganization powerpoint.

The MEU CLBs were not intended to exist as separate entities from the MEU. They have no table of organization (T/O) while assigned to CLR-27 and no official mission statement as a permanent command.[5] Regardless of what was intended to happen by the MLG reorganization, these units are maintaining personnel as if they were standing commands. However, during the period when they are assigned to CLR-27, what remains is a skeleton crew of those who are not executing end of active service (EAS) or permanent change of station (PCS) orders. Often, barely enough Marines remain to maintain equipment and perform combat service support missions for the CLR. During this period, the CLB has an even lower priority for manning than while attached to the MEU.[6] While this is appropriate, since they have no mission, it does not provide much functionality.

Engineers are not permanently assigned to any other CLBs.[7] Even as a result of the MLG reorganization, the Engineer Support Battalions (ESB) maintained unit integrity for good reason. The Direct Support (DS) CLBs are only manned with engineers for deployment. Upon return from deployment, the engineers go back to ESB where they can be trained and equipped for their next mission.

[5] LtCol Brad McNamara, interview by Capt Carr, 16 Dec 2008.
[6] LtCol Mary Augustus, interview by Capt Carr, 16 Dec 2008.
[7] Maj Gary McCullar, interview by Capt Carr, 16 Dec 2008.

The MEU CLB returns other elements to their parent commands upon return from deployment. The Medical Platoon is disbanded after returning from deployment. Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD) technicians return to their parent command. Food Service and other key MOS's are released to their parent commands after returning from deployment. Engineers should do the same.

The engineers that are assigned to the Battalion Landing Team (BLT) on the MEU are a good model. The engineers train as a platoon at Combat Engineer Battalion (CEB) and then attach to the MEU. Upon returning from the MEU deployment, they promptly return to CEB. Engineers with the CLB should follow a similar command relationship and timeline.

The MEU CLB should dissolve upon completion of post deployment requirements. If the engineers returned to 8th ESB for the six months that the CLBs are currently keeping them between MEU cycles (times three MEUs), the readiness and responsiveness of engineer support throughout 2d Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) would increase.

Equipment

The MEU CLBs have no approved table of equipment (T/E).[8] As a result, they are not included on the fielding plans for any new equipment that reaches the fleet. Previously, 8th ESB was

[8] Capt Jason Hernandez, interview by Capt Carr, 15 Dec 2008

responsible for providing specified quantities of engineer equipment to the MEUs when new items were fielded. This created an issue because ESB was no longer receiving the additional quantities for the MEUs since they were perceived to be *standing commands*, and the MEUs where not receiving the equipment directly because they were *not* standing commands. This discrepancy needs to be resolved in order to properly equip the MEU CLBs for deployment.

The proposed T/E for each CLB changes from commander to commander as the mission dictates. There are constant equipment transactions between 8th ESB and the MEU CLBs. Immediately upon attaching to the MEU, message traffic is generated in order to acquire necessary, serviceable equipment for deployment. Previously, the MEU CLBs would return their equipment to the owning command after post-deployment inspections and maintenance stand down. Currently, the CLBs maintain that equipment as they maintain the remainder of their personnel. However, with the reform of each CLB, equipment continues to be added and deleted from the unit consolidated memorandum receipt (CMR). The illusion of the CLB's permanent existence only causes additional equipment issues and complicates equipment records. Engineers in the MEU CLBs must constantly justify their equipment needs and rally for equipment in order to accomplish their mission. A more standardized approach would allow the parent command more

ownership of what equipment the engineers take to the MEU when they attach.

Training

Engineers do not have the necessary resources to conduct effective MOS training while assigned to the CLR. With a wide variety of Engineer MOS's and only a few Marines of each of those MOS's, experience and effective training methods are difficult to achieve. For example, there is no allocation for demolitions while the CLB is assigned to the CLR. They do not rate engineers, so why should they rate demolitions?[9] Basic demolitions are part of the individual training standards that Combat Engineers are required to maintain, and are unable to train to under this command structure. Another example is the difficulty of conducting earthmoving operations in training. If the heavy equipment operators are returned to their parent command, they have a better opportunity to conduct such training. Also, Marines in the utilities field do not generally receive the guidance and expertise they would get from senior members of their MOS because a Lance Corporal may be the most experienced member of their MOS in the unit. While they are proficient at their current job, it is difficult to advance without the specific knowledge of senior members of the MOS. By

[9] CLR-27 T/E.

returning the Marines to their parent command, they are reinforcing the structure of the ESB and receiving more effective MOS specific training. Engineers will be exposed to a greater depth of MOS experience, increased resources, broader knowledge base, and greater opportunity to lead in their MOS. This will result in greater MOS proficiency in the long run. Retaining junior Marines in the MEU CLBs for three years deprives them of valuable experience in their MOS.

A logistics battalion is not focused on engineer training. While the Marines will certainly gain experience in performing certain general engineering tasks while assigned to the CLB, not all aspects of each MOS are being developed.[10] Mobility, countermobility, survivability, and general engineering are not the primary mission of the CLB. If the Marines return to ESB they can hone their MOS skills, so that when the MEU forms for workups they will be ready to conduct training for MEU specific missions and predeployment requirements. The CLB's approach to conducting MOS training prior to attaching to the MEU (while a member of CLR-27) is not effective due to the lack of resources and training time available for each MOS. Assigning engineers to MEU CLBs for two consecutive deployments limits their leadership and MOS growth potential.

[10] David Ottignon. "Engineers in the Crossroads." *Marine Corps Gazzette,* June 2006, 8-11.

Counterarguments

The most convincing argument for the MEU CLBs to maintain personnel after detaching from the MEU is continuity. By forming the unit ahead of time, conceivably, there is more time to refine and train to unit standard operating procedures (SOPs) and develop a cohesive unit. However, key billets are gapped and there is no priority for filling them. The high turnover rate during the six months when the CLB is assigned to CLR-27 leaves the unit disjointed and not fully staffed until after they reassemble with the MEU again. Even if the manning issues were resolved, the benefit of a turnover does not outweigh the benefit of increased MOS proficiency, leadership opportunities, and a broader knowledge base.

Equipment stability may be seen as a benefit of keeping the MEU CLBs in tact. Since there is no set T/E, there is constant equipment turnover with the changing priorities of each commander and demands of expeditionary shipping.[11] This process is ongoing and is not alleviated by the fact that the Engineers are held with the CLBs. Furthermore, it is more difficult to obtain the necessary equipment because they fall under the CLB.

The concept that the unit's readiness is increased by retaining personnel between deployments is also flawed. During the period that the 2d MLG MEU CLBs are assigned to CLR-27, they

[11] CLB-22 Engineers, Post Deployment Equipment Replacement.

have no priority for manning. The CLB essentially becomes a holding place for Marines that are getting out of the Marine Corps, preparing to PCS, and the remainder of the depleted personnel are expected to perform the job of the unit at full strength. In addition, personnel are often pulled from the CLB to fill higher priority billets at other commands preparing to deploy. The CLB constantly struggles to retain the few personnel who are eligible to make the next deployment, in order to maintain equipment and accomplish the mission that is created.

Conclusion

The engineers in the MEU CLBs should be assigned on a temporary basis and return to their parent commands after each deployment. In order to increase unit continuity, prior to departing the CLB, turnover folders should be passed on to the S-3 to be issued to the incoming personnel as they reform for the next deployment. A face to face turnover can be conducted internally at 8th ESB for the Engineer Officer and other key billets within the detachment.

The current organization of the MEU CLBs under 2d MLG does not support the original intent of the MLG reorganization. The MEU CLBs do not deploy with CLR-27, so why should they report to them in garrison? Supported and supporting unit relationships

are not developed while attached to CLR-27 because the MEU CLBs are designed to support the MEU, not the CLR. The habitual working relationships that were created by realigning the MLG are non-existent in the MEU CLBs. As stated in MCDP 1, Marine units should be structured for war and then realigned for garrison operations. Engineers must return to their parent command to facilitate efficient employment of personnel, equipment, and training.

2064 words

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