

THE INCREASE IN TRAINING REQUIREMENTS IS HAVING AN ADVERSE
IMPACT ON TECHNICAL MOS PROFICIENCY

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What the Marine Corps is currently asking its Marines to accomplish is impossible. Every day, Marines throughout the Corps, are asked to take on more training at the expense of maintaining proficiency in their own military occupational specialty (MOS). The Marine Corps must eliminate extraneous annual and pre-deployment training requirements in order to allow Marines to attain proficiency with new technologies and maintain enduring MOS proficiency.

Administrative Training Requirements

Currently, Marines must accomplish numerous requirements most of which can be categorized as annual or semi-annual. Annually, the Corps asks Marines to complete marksmanship training that consists of rifle, pistol, or both depending on rank and assignment.¹ Marine Corps common skills training and evaluation are required annually for every private through gunnery sergeant, warrant officer-chief warrant officer 2, and second lieutenant-captain.² Nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) weapon training, including going to the gas chamber, is

¹ Commandant of the Marine Corps, Marine Corps Order 3574.2K, MARINE CORPS COMBAT MARKSMANSHIP PROGRAMS (1 August 2007), Enclosure 1, vi. Cited hereafter as CMC, MCO 3574.2K.

² Commandant of the Marine Corps, Marine Corps Order 1510.121A, MARINE CORPS COMMON SKILLS (MCCS) PROGRAM (1 October 2004), 3.

also required every year. Mandatory safety classes must also be attended twice a year to include³:

- alcohol awareness
- drunk driving
- aggressive driving
- operational risk management
- suicide awareness

Mandatory annual security training requirements include classes on:

- operational security⁴
- classification
- transportation of classified items
- antiterrorism/force protection level 1⁵
- espionage
- information assurance
- personally identifiable information⁶

In addition there are other requirements that come at different frequencies. Marine combat water survival training is conducted between one, two, three, four, and six years depending on the level of qualification of each individual.⁷ A minimum of

³ Commandant of the Marine Corps, Marine Corps Order 5100.29A, Change 1, MARINE CORPS SAFETY PROGRAM (10 October 2006), 10.

⁴ Commandant of the Marine Corps, Marine Corps Order 3070.2, THE MARINE CORPS OPERATIONS SECURITY (OPSEC) PROGRAM (18 May 2007), 5.

⁵ United States Marine Corps, NAVMC 2927, ANTITERRORISM/FORCE PROTECTION CAMPAIGN PLAN (9 March 1998), 2-1.

⁶ Commandant of the Marine Corps, MARADMIN 642/07, UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS (USMC) PERSONALLY IDENTIFIABLE INFORMATION (PII) ANNUAL POLICY REQUIREMENTS (30 October 2007).

⁷ Commandant of the Marine Corps, Marine Corps Order 1500.52C, MARINE COMBAT WATER SURVIVAL TRAINING (MCWST) (31 July 2004), 2.

30 minutes of physical fitness training is required each day, five days a week.⁸ The USMC also requires physical fitness tests semi-annually.⁹ Marines under 26 years of age must also complete the Driver Improvement Program.¹⁰ In addition, units require Marines to operate government vehicles and generators. Some of the equipment that many Marines must be licensed to operate include the following:

- commercial government vehicle
- high mobility multi-wheeled vehicle (HMMWV)
- medium tactical vehicle replacement (MTVR)(requires a HMMWV license)
- forklifts
- generators

The time needed to accomplish each one of these requirements can range from a day to several weeks. This list of requirements is not all-inclusive. Other requirements are dependent on the Marine's individual training standards. Failure to meet any of these requirements will affect the deployable status of the Marine and adversely impact the individual's competitiveness for promotion and retention.

⁸ Commandant of the Marine Corps, Marine Corps Order 6100.13, MARINE CORPS PHYSICAL FITNESS PROGRAM (1 August 2008), Enclosure 1, 1-2. Cited hereafter as CMC, MCO 6100.13.

⁹ CMC, MCO 6100.13, Enclosure 1, 2-1.

¹⁰ Commandant of the Marine Corps, MARADMIN 266/04, MCO 5100.19E OF 29 DEC 00 MARINE CORPS TRAFFIC SAFETY PROGRAM, CHANGE 3 (22 June 2004).

Besides training requirements most Marines have other ongoing requirements and responsibilities. According to the USMC User's Guide to Counseling, "Counseling is done on a regular basis by the senior officer, staff noncommissioned officer (SNCO), or noncommissioned officer (NCO) to whom the junior reports."¹¹ Like everything else, counseling takes time to prepare and conduct.

Marines also have to focus on their professional military education (PME) if they want to be promoted. PME should occur weekly at the unit level and Marines should be afforded the opportunity to attend formal PME. These formal schools, which apply to corporals through colonels, can be as short as several weeks or as long as a year. Each school is crucial to the education and training of that individual and necessary for promotion. One might argue that a Marine could enroll in the non-resident version of PME and, thus, remain in the training pipeline; however, the disparity in the quality of education from a stack of books instead of instructors and peers is immeasurable. Many non-resident courses in fact are becoming seminars necessitating Marines are present one evening a week, a requirement which can conflict with different training requirements.

¹¹ United States Marine Corps, NAVMC 2795, USMC USER'S GUIDE TO COUNSELING (21 July 1986), 1-3.

Finally, all of the previously mentioned requirements are completed in conjunction with the unit's training schedule which would include exercises, operations, various stand-downs, and unit functions. Marine's still have to account for, maintain, train-on, and effectively employ their equipment or perform their occupational function.

Predeployment Training Requirements

A noticeable increase in requirements for every Marine has also occurred, especially for those preparing for deployment. Most units have been on a constant deployment cycle for five years. One would assume that predeployment training and preparation would be streamlined and standardized, but it is not. Requirements are constantly added or modified based on lessons learned and changes in the operating environment. The problem is that as requirements are added none are taken away. This dilemma is causing many leaders to make difficult decisions about what to cut from the schedule in order to incorporate the new requirements.

Different predeployment training programs are tailored to the various missions that units are preparing to execute overseas. These programs are identified as "blocks" and each builds off of the previous. The type of mission the unit is expected to perform will determine how many of the "blocks" the

unit members will have to complete. These range from Block I, which concentrates on individual tasks and mastering basic war fighting skills to include incidental driver training and crew-served weapons training, through Block IV, which prepares units to conduct offensive combat operations focusing on squad, platoon, and company-sized elements, and engaging with the insurgency, Iraqi Security Forces, and civilians. All of the "blocks" are overseen by trained instructors and Blocks III and IV are assessed at Mojave Viper, Desert Talon, or Mountain Warrior.¹²

In addition to block training other major predeployment requirements include the following:

- administrative audits
- medical audits
- pre-deployment health assessments
- shots
- pre-deployment neuro-cognitive assessments¹³
- dental
- threat brief
- culture brief
- language courses
- combat life-saver courses

Marines who have HMMWV and MTRV licenses attend additional training in order to drive the up-armored HMMWV or MTRV. This upgraded license is a prerequisite for the training to operate

¹² Commandant of the Marine Corps, MARADMIN 740/07, THE PRE-DEPLOYMENT TOOLKIT (19 December 2007).

¹³ Commandant of the Marine Corps, MARADMIN 633/08, BASELINE PRE-DEPLOYMENT NEUROCOGNITIVE ASSESSMENTS (14 November 2008).

the mine resistant ambush protected (MRAP) vehicle that is being used in Iraq right now.¹⁴ The important thing to remember is that all of the regular requirements must be met in addition to these predeployment requirements in order for Marines to be in a "deployable" status.

Additional New Requirements

Not all of the additional requirements are related to predeployment training. A severe increase in motorcycle accidents led to the requirement for every Marine who rides a motorcycle to complete the week-long Motorcycle Safety Foundation's Basic Riders Course before he/she can ride on or off base.¹⁵ The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP) has been included in the training requirements for all Marines as well. Marines must meet a designated minimum belt standard based on their MOS.¹⁶ In addition, this program is required to be incorporated into every unit's training and sustained by every Marine. The Marine Corps is also currently incorporating the Combat Fitness Test (CFT) as a semi-annual requirement.¹⁷

¹⁴ Commandant of the Marine Corps, MARADMIN 657/08, UPDATED MINE RESISTANT AMBUSH PROTECTED (MRAP) LICENSING REQUIREMENT (21 November 2008).

¹⁵ Conway, James T., Commandant of the Marine Corps, ALMAR 014/08, Private Motor Vehicle and Motorcycle Safety Requirements (25 April 2008).

¹⁶ Conway, James T., Commandant of the Marine Corps, ALMAR 034/07, Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP) Update (16 July 2007).

¹⁷ CMC, MCO 6100.13, Enclosure 1, 3-1.

Training for this new requirement is supposed to be part of every unit's training plan. It is thought that if a unit plans accordingly they can accomplish physical fitness, combat fitness, and martial arts training during the prescribed minimum standard of five combat conditioning sessions of 30 minutes each week. Thirty minutes may be ample time to accomplish training to prepare for the PFT and CFT, but no techniques in MCMAP can be taught in that period of time. A third "table" of firing is now required for annual rifle training (ART), adding additional training days to this requirement. Marines with an 03XX designation assigned to infantry units now have a fourth "table" to complete for ART.¹⁸

The Negative Effect on Technical Competency

All of these training requirements take time away from practicing the individual Marine's occupational specialty. Part of the problem is that the all-encompassing requirements, old and new, are tracked on predeployment check-lists or unit statistic spreadsheets. Units will ensure their Marines are deployable and that their training statistics are high, yet no predeployment checklist requirement exists to be technically proficient on the equipment that they will be operating while

¹⁸CMC, MCO 3574.2K, Enclosure 1, vi.

deployed. Therefore, MOS training is reduced or dropped in order to make room for the requirements that are being tracked. The result is that Marines are less technically competent.

Ironically, as a result of the ongoing conflict, the Marine Corps has invested money in acquiring new and better equipment. The communications field, for example, has replaced or upgraded every major end-item for radio, switching, transmission, and data. New and more capable equipment also means more complicated and complex. New equipment training (NET) is being conducted as the equipment is fielded but only a small percentage of the Marines are available to attend due to number of seats and Marine availability. Even the Marines who are able to attend will not retain that knowledge without constant interaction with the equipment. The Marines who are getting ready to deploy are tactically ready, but few are technically capable. The Marines who are technically proficient carry the weight of others until they learn, but often this does not occur until they are already deployed. The mission will be accomplished, but the equipment probably will not be used to its fullest capabilities, and the service provided to the staff will not be as good as it should be.

All of the requirements that are reportable and currently being tracked are general annual, semi-annual, and pre-

deployment related; none are related to technical occupational skills. Leaders are focusing their primary efforts that ensure their Marines are maintaining a deployable status by accomplishing the ever-growing number of training requirements that are being reported and tracked. They then focus the remaining time on new equipment training and technical proficiency. The second and third order effects will not reveal themselves as blatant failures on the battlefield; rather, they will be slightly less noticeable. Nevertheless potentially critical events like less reliable communication networks, slower maintenance turnaround, less efficient repairs, slower response and delivery of critical classes of supply result. Any of these events occurring at a critical time and place while deployed or in training would adversely impact Marine effectiveness and force protection.

Leaders need a more manageable number of requirements to allow for critical MOS training, especially NET. Marines must reach and maintain the technical proficiency necessary to contribute successfully to the fight. Some argue that adequate time exists to accomplish all requirements and to maintain a high level of technical proficiency. The 0612, basic wireman, MOS is one of the many MOSs that refutes this supposition because it is experiencing a drastic technological change.

Marines who were once responsible for running "gunloops," connecting two and four wire telephones and interfacing with basic switchboards are now responsible for installing, interfacing, programming, and maintaining highly complex commercial switchboards and associated equipment. The NET, which came with the fielding, lasted for three weeks. The training only covered the basic function, programming, and interface of the equipment and not how to apply it to a tactical network. To employ the equipment effectively it took several months of daily interaction.

Several things need to occur to help with this problem. First, the Marine Corps needs to stop adding requirements. Current administrative requirements need to be validated, consolidated, and offered in electronic format. Doing so will reduce the number of stand-downs that interfere with training and afford Marines the flexibility to accomplish these requirements around other training commitments. Some annual training requirements can be reduced by making them predeployment training, thus, requiring less frequency. NBC training is an example, it doesn't make sense to walk through a gas chamber once a year with a gas mask that you will not see again, but it makes perfect sense to do NBC predeployment training gaining confidence with the mask and equipment that you

will using while deployed. Finally, technical proficiency should be tracked as a predeployment requirement. Simply filling in a roster with a particular spread of MOSs does not guarantee technical competence

Conclusion

The Marine Corps has too many annual, semi-annual, and predeployment training requirements. These requirements must be reduced in order to allow Marines to maintain a high level of technical readiness. Failure to do so will result in a unit focused solely on reportable requirements and a poor level of technical proficiency, especially on new equipment. Ultimately technical competency ensures combat effectiveness and force protection on the battlefield.

2000 words

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