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14. ABSTRACT

Adhering to a Cold War-era ideal of the administrative convoy, and failing to realize the lessons of Korea and Vietnam, the Marine Corps never structured unit tables of organization or tailored MOSs and tactics to meet the realities of convoy security. In case studies of the Korean War, the French War in Indochina and the Vietnam War, units were caught completely unprepared and vulnerable to brutal attacks that threatened the mission at a strategic level. In each case, units struggled to radically change their operations and equipment to catch up to an enemy who was well within our OODA loop.

In the past as now, there is a wide gap in Marine Corps structure and doctrine: convoy security is a mission formally assigned to no unit. This gap has resulted in work-arounds such as co-opting Military police and creating ad hoc security units of mixed MOSs. In addition, Cold War-era convoy doctrine emphasized convoys escorted by armored vehicles or infantry, resulting in the retention of tactics created for armored troop carriers or reconnaissance vehicles that do not make sense for gun trucks.

Case studies of historic convoy operations bear out the conclusion that attacks on supply lines are not unique to current war and that convoy security is and has been an enduring requirement. As the Marine Corps looks to the future, and decides how to preserve the lessons of OIF and OEF, we face a security environment of increasing irregular threats from state and nonstate actors that transition between conventional and irregular warfare. The 2010 Marine Corps Operating Concept found that "Conventional warfare and irregular warfare are subsets of war that exist simultaneously, to one

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extent or another, on every battlefield.”

The Marine Corps as an institution must ensure that the allure of imagined strictly “conventional” war does not cause us to ignore the stark realities of numerous wars since World War II. Transportation units that are already manned, equipped and trained for the security mission give the commander flexible options, keep his supply lines open, and provide economy of force by reducing the drain on his combat arms forces. In order to be prepared to succeed in future conflicts, the Marine Corps should do as the French did and as our American predecessors in Vietnam did, and shift responsibility for the convoy security mission to transportation units.

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Closing the Convoy Security Gap

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Illustrations

	Page
Figure 1. HMMWV Scout Platoon Escorting Convoy	14
Figure 2. Escort Suppresses Ambush for Reaction Force Attack	14
Figure 3. Convoy Assumes Herringbone Formation	16

Executive Summary

Title: Closing the Convoy Security Gap

Author: Major Anna V. Reves, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: In order to retain and institutionalize the lessons of recent wars and be prepared for the next, the Marine Corps should acknowledge the enduring requirement for convoy security and assign that mission to motor transport units.

Discussion: Adhering to a Cold War-era ideal of the administrative convoy, and failing to realize the lessons of Korea and Vietnam, the Marine Corps never structured unit tables of organization or tailored MOSs and tactics to meet the realities of convoy security. Case studies of the Korean War, the French War in Indochina and the American war in Vietnam demonstrate that in each case, units were caught completely unprepared and vulnerable to brutal attacks that threatened the entire mission at a strategic level. In each case, transportation units struggled to radically change their operations and equipment in order to catch up to an enemy who was well within our observe-orient-decide-act (OODA) loop.

In the past as now, there is a wide gap in Marine Corps structure and doctrine: convoy security is a mission formally assigned to no unit. This gap has resulted in work-arounds such as co-opting Military police and creating ad hoc security units of mixed MOSs. In addition, Cold War-era convoy doctrine emphasized convoys escorted by armored vehicles or infantry, resulting in the retention of tactics created for armored troop carriers or reconnaissance vehicles that do not make sense for gun trucks.

Case studies of historic convoy operations bear out the conclusion that attacks on supply lines are not unique to current war and that convoy security is and has been an enduring requirement. As the Marine Corps looks to the future, and decides how to preserve the lessons of OIF and OEF, we face a security environment of increasing irregular threats from state and nonstate actors that transition between conventional and irregular warfare. The 2010 *Marine Corps Operating Concept* found that “Conventional warfare and irregular warfare are subsets of war that exist simultaneously, to one extent or another, on every battlefield.”¹

Conclusion: In order to avoid repeating the mistakes of past wars, the Marine Corps must record and formalize the convoy security mission, unit structure, and equipment sets. Changing the mission of motor transport units to encompass convoy security is a critical step towards preserving lessons, institutionalizing structure, and in avoiding the mistakes made after past wars in order to ensure effective and protected supply lines in future wars. Transportation units that are manned, equipped and trained for the security mission give the commander flexible options, keep crucial supply lines open, and provide economy of force by reducing the drain on his combat arms forces.

Table of Contents

	Page
DISCLAIMER	i
ILLUSTRATIONS	ii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	iii
INTRODUCTION - At the Crossroads	1
Convoy Security: An Enduring Requirement?	4
Korean War	4
French War in Indochina	6
American War in Vietnam	8
Future War	11
The Convoy Gap – Challenges of Current Doctrine and Structure	13
Analysis – Provisional Solutions to the Convoy Security Gap.....	18
Military Police as Convoy Escort	18
Provisional Security Companies	19
Self-Securing Truck Units	21
The Way Ahead	23
Personnel.....	23
Doctrine and Tactics	24
Equipment.....	25
Conclusion	26

Introduction

At the Crossroads

For the last ten years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, motor transport Marines and logistics officers have operated and innovated in a time of upheaval and change within the convoy community. Truck units entered the war in Iraq armed with obsolete doctrine, organization and training, and struggled with the contradiction between the Marine Corps's Cold War-era convoy security doctrine and the reality in Iraq of systematic attacks on US supply lines. Wrestling with these issues, units responded with adaptation and innovation. The result has been a slow, seismic shift in the very fundamentals of convoy operations, of the culture, and of the understanding of the place of convoys on the battlefield. These changes were personality-driven, occurred sporadically, and varied widely. Units have coped in different ways with the stark differences between reality on the ground and deeply ingrained doctrine and tactics.

At the end of this wartime era of transformation, the Marine Corps must resolve these contradictions and decide how it will reconcile the hard lessons of the last decade. For the last 10 years, Marines unknowingly struggled through the difficult footsteps of the motor transport Marines of Vietnam. Faced with the same problems, today's Marines innovated in startlingly similar ways. Now we stand at the same crossroad where the Army and Marine Corps transportation units stood at the end of Vietnam. Sadly, the Army and Marine Corps failed to preserve the legacy of the bloody attacks on US supply lines in Vietnam. While the hard and costly lessons of the last 10 years are still sharp and vivid in the minds of this generation, the lessons will survive only as long as those Marines serve. The question here is what tactical and

structural changes to draw from these conflicts, and how best to permanently institutionalize them.

During the period of innovation of the last decade, changes have been made to unit equipment sets and training standards, however these piecemeal changes only address some symptoms of a larger institutional problem. Many problems of unit training and equipment gaps can be traced to root disparities in doctrine and organization. In order to solve symptomatic problems in the long term, planners must identify where the responsibility for convoy security lies. Close analysis reveals a surprising answer. No unit in the Marine Corps is assigned the mission of convoy security – no infantry unit, no military police battalion, not even motor transport units themselves. This is a problem of doctrine, of structure and of missions. These form the foundation upon which training standards, equipment sets, and ammunition allocations are built. These are the changes that can stand the test of time.

The lack of any unit assigned the task of convoy security stems from two institutional assumptions: (1) an assumption that convoys only rarely require security, and (2) an assumption that security is not the domain of the motor transport Marines and logistics officers, but of some external unit. The contradiction here is that these assumptions are directly at odds with reality in recent wars, both in terms of the threat to supply lines, and in terms of the realistic availability of external forces to secure convoys. For this reason this root problem of a lack of assigned convoy security mission is directly disruptive to mission accomplishment. This structural gap is closely tied to a Cold War doctrine that wrongly assumed that the idealized rear area of the World War II European front would be the model battlefield for all future Marine Corps engagements.

During the last 10 years, convoy units have suffered from lagging training standards, burdensome and conflicted convoy chains of commands, illogical tactics, widely varying

approaches to convoy roles and responsibilities, and use of hastily assembled and inexperienced units to provide convoy security. This paper proposes that Marine Corps convoy security structure and doctrine is deeply flawed and must be reformed through lasting institutional change in order to avoid costly manpower drains and tactical errors made in both Vietnam and Iraq. The most critical institutional change is assignment of the convoy security mission within the Marine Corps. In order to validate the need for this change, this paper will test the assumption that convoy attacks are unique to wars of the last decade by reviewing historic case studies and Department of Defense (DoD) operating concepts for future conflicts. It will also analyze the impacts of the assumption that motor transport Marines and leaders should rely on external units for security. Finally, it will provide recommended changes to doctrine and structure.

During this period of drawdown, logistics units are faced with an identity crisis, just as those in Vietnam were at the end of that war. To resolve it, Marine Corps transportation units must answer the critical question of "who we are" -- or better yet, "who must we be" to sustain the supply lines and execute future missions. The answer to this question will determine whether we return to a largely Cold War convoy template, or whether we change to address the lessons of recent wars. Most critically, we must answer the question: should motor transport units formally take on the security mission? This paper finds that the answer is: yes. *In order to retain and institutionalize the lessons of recent wars and be prepared for the next, the Marine Corps should acknowledge the enduring requirement for convoy security and assign that mission to motor transport units.*

Convoy Security: An Enduring Requirement?

Some might argue that the need for convoy security is unique to recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and that therefore there is no need for a standing security mission, equipment set, gunnery standards and ammunition allocations. This argument deserves close analysis. This section will study units which faced significant attacks on supply lines in the recent past and review how did they adapted and responded. Three case studies can shed more light on the history of attacks on convoys and successful changes in convoy structure and tactics: the Korean War, the French Indochina War, and the American war in Vietnam. To Marines who felt they were discovering a new type of tactic in a new type of war, the similarities will be astonishing. The final question is equally pressing – what will future war look like and will convoy security remain relevant?

The Korean War

In October of 1950, North Korean forces cut off by the Inchon landing began increasing guerrilla action behind friendly lines. According to Joseph Tierney's book *Chasing Ghosts: Unconventional Warfare in American History*, guerrillas in South Korea ambushed convoys on both the east coast routes and the western route through the mountains between Pusan and Taegu. He notes that "Some of the most destructive of the attacks behind the lines occurred along the main rail and highway route between Wonsan and Hungnam." In one attack on this route, 22 U.S. vehicles were destroyed after drivers were forced to flee into rice paddies.² 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines (3/1) was assigned the defense of an important road intersection at Majon-ni, a place only accessible by a winding single-lane mountain road. This road became known as

"Ambush Alley" as North Korean forces frequently ambushed Marine convoys traveling along the road to Majon-ni. As ambushes increased, 3/1 went a week without any convoys getting through and was forced to request an air drop, which luckily landed on target in the drop zone. Because of a lack of convoy security, Colonel Lewis B. Puller attempted to protect the convoys by sending Company A, 1st Battalion 1st Marines to escort a convoy of 34 vehicles. After being caught in an ambush of heavy automatic weapons fire, the convoy was forced to turn back, and did not get through until a second attempt on the following day. 3rd Battalion's stay at Majon-ni lasted just 17 days until the position was turned over to the Army. In that time, Smith notes that "90 Marines became casualties in the series of convoy fights along Ambush Alley."³

The attacks on supply lines during the Korean War provide both an example of the vulnerability of convoys and the direct impact on the mission when convoys are not equipped to defend themselves. While the attacks on the road to Majon-ni were particularly vicious, Marine logistics unit would experience attacks by company-size elements in similarly difficult terrain in Vietnam and began to adapt to survive these types of brutal attacks. In his history of convoy security, *Circle the Wagons*, Richard Killbane notes that initially in Korea, as they did in World War II, convoys moved without escorts, and truck units had few crew served weapons. However, truck units adapted and soon found the machine guns attached to the ring mounts worked well against enemy soldiers. "For the first time, cargo vehicles had self-defense weapons that inspired respect from the enemy."⁴

The French War in Indochina

Americans still have to learn from the French that the latter lost during the Indochina war over 500 armored vehicles...present operations in South Viet-Nam confirm that Viet-Minh have lost none of their fearsome ability to lay traps for motorized convoys. Many an ambush in recent months differed only in size from that which destroyed G.M. 100 in 1954.⁵

–*Street Without Joy*, Bernard Fall, 1961

The 1951 battle for the town of Hoa-Binh and its supply artery along Highway 6 precipitated the French practice in Vietnam of building a system of forts along supply routes to secure transit of convoys. A year later, the French forces took an additional measure of clearing underbrush from the sides of the road to create fields of fire for convoy weapons 100-200 meters from the road. Before clearing the roads, the French had lost nearly 100 vehicles to ambushes on Highway 6.⁶ In addition to strong points and patrols on unsecure roads, the French also changed their transportation unit structure. In the 1955 French military after-action review *Lessons of the War in Indochina*, the French would make an observation that sounds eerily familiar today: "the movement of a motor convoy in an insecure and heavily covered area should be organized as a combat operation."⁷

In *Street Without Joy*, Bernard Fall describes a typical ambush as beginning by immobilizing the lead and trail vehicles, and occurring in an area where the sides of the roads are mined. The kill zone is under machine gun and mortar fire, and often additional ambushes are emplaced for responding quick reaction forces.⁸ Following a deep penetration into enemy territory that was intended to cut the Viet Minh supply lines, a French task force began movement back to French lines, passing through Chan-Muong Valley. After the infantry and tank platoon were clear of the valley, the unarmored vehicles in the center of the convoy made their way through. These soft vehicles carried the headquarters element, the reserve ammunition

and the engineer equipment. The ambush started with enemy artillery and mortars, which disabled a tank at the front of the column, trapping the rest of the convoy and pinning down the infantry at the far end of the valley. The Communist infantry then rushed the soft center of the convoy along an 800 meter front. "Communist troops finished off drivers and headquarters troops with burp guns, hand grenades, and daggers, specialized Chinese saboteurs blew up the vehicles one by one."⁹ As the Mobile Group commander outside the kill zone directed artillery fire, the fighting in the center of the convoy "degenerated into a veritable massacre, with the Viet-Minh methodically killing all of the French wounded." French air arrived on station and eased some pressure, but the attack was finally beaten off by the French infantry. Losses totaled 12 vehicles, 56 dead, 125 wounded and 125 missing.¹⁰

The attacks suffered in Indochina caused the French Transportation Corps to make changes to its structure. Truck companies included a security element with scout cars or half-track vehicles. Each platoon was allocated one security vehicle with troops in the back. However, many officers felt this was insufficient and requested two vehicles per platoon, in addition to increases in allocated light mortars and rifle grenades. The report also states that "in extensive areas with feeble populations and few guerrilla forces, each element on the march was prepared to defend itself." In the worst situations, "where the enemy could engage significant forces...security elements were used to cover the road and convoys were armed for self-defense." A motorized, sometimes armored reserve was maintained on alert in some sectors, but the after-action makes clear that even these roads are never fully secure and convoys must be able to defend themselves. The message of the French war in Indochina was clear - supply lines were a key, high-reward target for the enemy, and convoys could suffer horrible losses, even when escorted by infantry and combat arms. Although the Americans would have to learn this lesson

over again, they adapted well, and began to understand that the most important tactic was to bring heavy firepower to bear quickly from more than one platform, and to get out of the kill zone as quickly as possible.¹¹

American War in Vietnam

The mission, on the surface, sounded simple enough: provide motor transport support to tactical forces in the II Corps tactical zone. But the 8th [Transportation Group] was to find a set of obstacles confronting them totally unlike any encountered by any other group of truckers in the history of modern warfare.¹²

– 8th Transportation Group 1967-1968, Colonel Joe Bellino, 1968

The Americans in Vietnam traveled the same roads, often in mountainous terrain characterized by rough roads and switchbacks. Convoy commanders rapidly found themselves leading missions on a dangerous system of supply routes. A US Army study on Vietnam, *Logistic Support*, stated, "Convoy security support was provided by U.S. and Vietnamese units when priorities permitted; often the desired degree of support was not available. It was also desirable to have armored personnel carriers integrated into the convoy, but they were not always available."¹³ Beginning in 1967, attacks on US supply lines would become central to the war in Vietnam. General Westmoreland believed in the strategic importance of holding the central highlands of Vietnam. For that purpose, he established bases along Route 19, the location of the famous destruction of French regimental-sized Mobile Group 100 in 1954. The bases were located at An Khe and Pleiku. In September 1967, attacks on U.S. convoys along Route 19 began as the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) launched a campaign against U.S. supply lines.¹⁴

The commanding officer of the Army 8th Transportation Group, Colonel Joe Bellino, may not have been a close student of history, and (like most Americans) certainly not of the history of the French in Vietnam, but he did grasp the weight of the brutal attacks that were

unfolding against his truck units. He also understood the stark contradiction between the World War II doctrine that was the bread and butter of convoy units, and the shockingly different reality on the ground for which the U.S. Army was not prepared. On 2 September 1967 a convoy of 37 vehicles was moving through the An Khe pass when it was ambushed by a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) company. The lead jeep was knocked out by a 57mm recoilless rifle, and a 5,000 gallon fuel tanker at the rear of the convoy was hit and began to burn. Drivers were so unprepared that some didn't even know they were in an ambush until they realized the vehicles ahead of them were hit. J.D. Calhoun, a driver of a 2 1/2 ton truck thought to himself, "Oh crap. I can't sit in a truck. I've got to get out and get behind something." As drivers dismounted, NVA troops attacked out of the woods. The drivers carried little ammunition, which was quickly used up in the firefight. Richard Killbane's convoy history states that "In 10 minutes, the enemy had destroyed or damaged 30 of the 37 vehicles, killing seven men and wounding 17." Killbane notes that, unable to achieve success against the U.S. air-assault concept, "the NVA had found the Achilles' heel of the Americans."¹⁵

Changes began coming quickly after the devastating 2 September attack. The leadership of the 8th Transportation Group attended a meeting called by the Commanding General of I Field Force at An Khe. 1st Infantry Division (mechanized) was assigned to guard Route 19 by manning checkpoints at danger areas along the highway such as culverts and bypasses to blown-out bridges. The tanks and mechanized infantry at the checkpoints would also serve as a quick reaction force. These checkpoints would prove critical to relieve beleaguered convoys, to stop convoys if there were units were engaged ahead, and to pass intelligence to convoy commanders. Like the French, an engineer battalion began clearing vegetation out to 1,000 meters from the road. Convoys would get no combat vehicle escorts, only two MP jeeps, one in the front and one

in the rear of the convoy. After leaving the meeting at An Khe, the leadership of the 8th Transportation Group decided that their convoys would have to develop a way to protect themselves. A standard operating procedure (SOP) was developed that stressed that during an ambush the most critical action was for unarmored vehicles to push out of the kill zone immediately. Drivers of disabled vehicles would be picked up by the next truck.¹⁶

The 8th Transportation Group also began creating gun trucks by welding on steel plates and mounting quad .50 caliber and M-60 machine guns in the beds of cargo vehicles. Once ring mounts were added, gun trucks averaged three guns per truck. Gun jeeps were also added to the convoys from the truck companies. Gun trucks averaged one per 10 cargo trucks. Killbane notes a change in tactics from the convoys of the Korean War: "In Korea, trucks with machine guns drove out of the kill zone; the Vietnam-era gun truck raced into it. Their objective changed to placing suppressive fire upon the enemy and rescuing the drivers either wounded or trapped in the kill zone."¹⁷ The gun truck mission was to escort cargo vehicles out of the kill zone, rescue drivers of down vehicles, and most importantly to mass fires on the enemy. Over time this method became more prevalent as all gun trucks in the convoy would rush into the kill zone.¹⁸ By the next major ambush in November, six gun trucks were in the convoy. The first gun truck was taken out by a B-40 rocket, and three of the following vehicles were also disabled, blocking the rest of the convoy. While four of the gun trucks were damaged in heavy fighting, the last two stayed in action, suppressing the enemy until the 4th Infantry Division reaction force arrived. In total, two Americans were killed, 17 wounded were captured, and 14 trucks were lost. The NVA suffered 41 killed and four wounded. As Killbane put it, "The cost of ambushing convoys had escalated for the enemy."¹⁹

Killbane notes that military police escorts were useful in communicating with traffic MPs, local police, and in handling civilian incidents. However he states that they were not appropriately structured or equipped to provide convoy security. Because of this lack of weapons and armor, their SOP was to push the convoy through, not to move to the kill zone to rescue drivers and engage the enemy. Noting the extreme risks that drivers would take to save other drivers, Killbane states that "Since gun-truck crews had started out as drivers of task vehicles, they more closely identified with the men they were responsible to protect. Truck drivers proved the best and bravest defenders of other truck drivers." He concludes that security forces manned from within the transportation units are the most effective option.²⁰

The most deadly time period for convoys was the first 15-20 minutes, which was how long most ambushes lasted. It would often take the reaction force 15 minutes or more to arrive.²¹ In this role the gun truck was critical to protecting the convoys. While it reduced the number of available drivers, the practice of convoys providing their own gun trucks freed infantry and combat arms units to prosecute other missions. Protecting the convoys meant keeping the supply lines open and maintaining the ground force commander's options. Protecting convoys also meant reducing enemy victories in the strategic information war both among the Vietnamese and among the American population.

Future War

While convoy security is a consideration in any type of warfare, protection of supply lines is even more critical when engaged in irregular warfare. The Chinese communist leader Mao Tse-tung created a comprehensive doctrine on guerrilla warfare that has been emulated by many other insurgencies. Mao stated in his lecture "On Protracted War" that "...our forces will

be switched in large numbers to the enemy's rear in comparatively dispersed dispositions, and... launch extensive, fierce guerrilla warfare against enemy-organized areas."²² Mao also believed in waging a protracted war against more powerful opponents by transitioning between guerrilla warfare, mobile warfare, and conventional warfare as the situation dictated. The 2010 *Marine Corps Operating Concept* confirms this fluid transition between types of warfare, commonly termed hybrid war: "Conventional warfare and irregular warfare are subsets of war that exist simultaneously, to one extent or another, on every battlefield."²³ The *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* stresses the prominent role of irregular warfare in future conflicts:

Given the prevalence of irregular threats in the current and expected future operating environment, the US military must become as proficient in addressing irregular threats as it is in confronting conventional or regular threats. Historically, the joint force has focused its efforts on defeating a state adversary's conventional military forces. Current and future adversaries are more likely to pose irregular threats.²⁴

In their *Joint Forces Quarterly* article, Sebastian Gorka and David Kilcullen state that less than 20% of wars in the last 200 years have been conventional wars between armies of states.²⁵ The 2009 Quadrennial Roles and Missions Report lists irregular as one of six joint force "core missions", and the Department of Defense Directive 3000.7 "recognizes that irregular warfare is as strategically important as traditional warfare."²⁶ The key here is not just that the DoD is planning for a continued prevalence of irregular warfare, but that a common tactic of insurgencies is to transition between irregular and conventional warfare in the same conflict. Militaries must be prepared for both. The DoD emphasis on both the importance and increasing frequency of irregular warfare makes it clear that convoy security will only become more relevant in future conflicts.

The Convoy Security Gap – Challenges of Current Doctrine and Structure

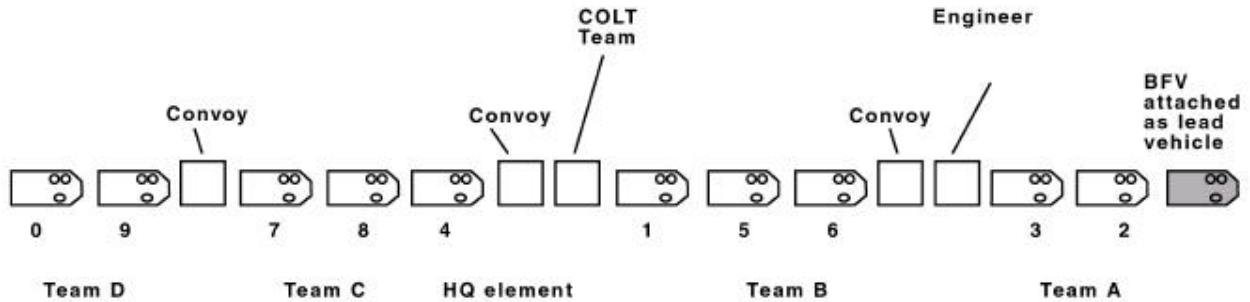
Post-Vietnam doctrine left the Marine Corps with tactics that were created for armored maneuver elements and mission sets that assigned no unit the task of convoy security. In choosing a doctrine built around an idealized linear battlefield, the Marine Corps of the 1980s and 1990s disregarded the not only lessons of our own experiences such as the Indian Wars, Banana Wars, Korea and Vietnam, but also the lessons of other conflicts including the French in Indochina and the Soviets in Afghanistan. In essence, under this doctrine and structure, there was no security for convoys. In exceptional cases it would be provided by combat arms units. The need for security was ‘assumed away’ along with any persistent threat to supply lines, despite the very recent and very costly experience of Vietnam.

When the threat could not be ‘assumed away’, and truck units tried to provide their own security, ammunition allocations were scarce, training was personality-driven, and tactics did not make sense for gun trucks whose mission was convoy protection, not maneuver and pursuit. The results of this doctrine have created challenges that logistics officers struggle with today – in MOS training standards, SOPs, weapons systems, and vehicle types, among others. However, these officers often fail to realize that the immediate challenges are merely symptoms caused by an underlying systemic problem. There is in fact a largely unseen but very real black hole in the Marine Corps when it comes to convoy security. In the past as now, convoy security was a mission formally assigned to no one, and the lessons of that mistake are ones the Marine Corps has been forced to relearn with each new conflict. This is the convoy security gap.

Before Operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Enduring Freedom (OEF), convoy doctrine emphasized convoys escorted by armored vehicles or infantry. In the author’s experience in

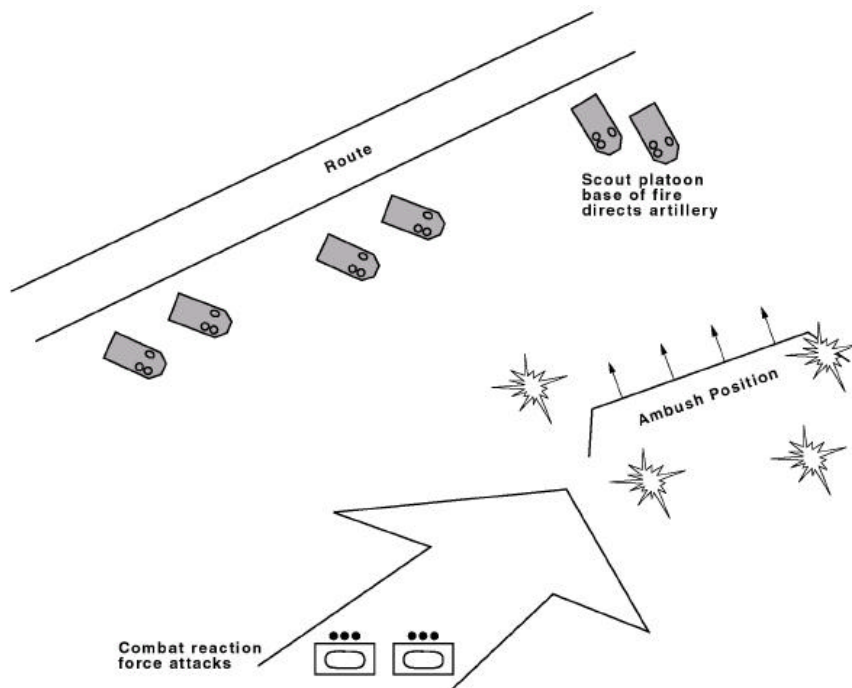
Iraq, combat arms and infantry were rarely, if ever, spared for escort of logistics convoys. The Marine Corps-unique convoy publication, Marine Corps Reference Publication (MCRP) 4-11.3F *Convoy Operations Handbook*, signed September 2001 still uses tactics built around combat arms convoy escorts. Figure 1 below is a diagram of a convoy escort from the MCRP 4-11.3F.²⁷

Figure 1. HMMWV Scout Platoon Escorting Convoy.



In the *Handbook*, it is the escort platoon leader (specifically a scout platoon leader) who gives the convoy operation order.²⁸ The Handbook also features images (Figure 2 below) of Bradley Fighting Vehicles attacking enemy positions as the convoy simply pushes past.²⁹

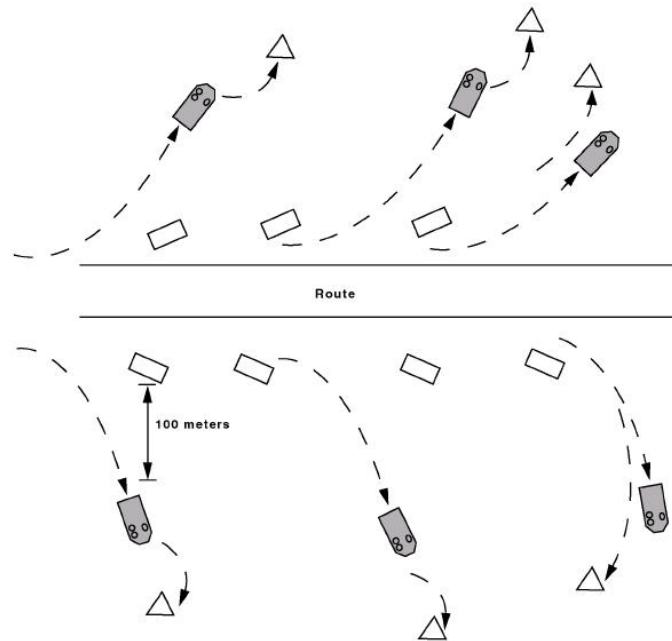
Figure 2. Escort Suppresses Ambush for Reaction Force Attack.



This doctrine leaves the convoy commander with an almost nonexistent tactical role and reduces the role of the Marines in the truck platoon to simply driving. The Marine Corps has taken a step forward in participating in the 2009 multi-service publication *Tactical Convoy Ops*, MCRP 4-11.3H. Unfortunately, this publication also refers to a notional external “convoy escort unit” and states that the security element commander “maintains his own dedicated internal communication.” However, *Tactical Convoy Ops* does take a step forward in emphasizing tactical roles of Marines in the convoy who are not part of the notional “convoy escort unit,”³⁰ and the pub also makes a critical distinction that the convoy commander gives the operation order and is the “ultimate on-ground decision maker.”³¹

The doctrinal assignment of convoy security to combat arms units, combined with a complete absence of any Table of Organization (T/O) mission for this role ultimately meant that truck units would have to solve this problem themselves. More than this, it created a confusion of roles as truck units attempted to superimpose armored reconnaissance tactics on convoy security trucks. When the author was a platoon commander, it was commonplace during halts for truck units to attempt to position their vehicles in a herringbone, and to dismount all Marines. This technique is perpetuated not only in the 2001 *Convoy Operations Handbook*, but in the 2009 *Tactical Convoy Ops* publication. This is a perfect example of the utter confusion instilled by the major shift that was happening in convoy security roles. As prescribed in the *Convoy Operations Handbook*, halting in a herringbone is a tactic meant for armored combat arms vehicles, not a convoy that would need to exit any kill zone quickly.³²

Figure 3. Convoy Assumes Herringbone Formation.



Herringbone formations (Figure 3 above) give no firing advantage to crew served weapons on a 360 degree ring mount, only to vehicles such as LAVs that may actually maneuver off the road to attempt to assault or flank an enemy attack. Dismounting Marines from armored trucks also serves no defensive purpose, especially in wide open desert, except possibly to expose more personnel to the effects of an ambush or an improvised explosive device (IED) blast. The confusion of roles between armored vehicles and convoy security trucks caused intelligent officers to continue to execute these tactics. In light of these conflicting perceptions, the T/O missions and tasks of Combat Logistics Battalion (CLB) and Division truck companies continue to leave a gaping hole as the end note to a tumultuous decade of innovation and evolution.

With a lack of combat arms or military police units available to support convoys, the concept of relying on these units became impractical. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq quickly revealed the wide gap that had been left in convoy doctrine following the Vietnam War -- the convoy security gap. As this gap between doctrine and reality was exposed, units implemented

various solutions. Some Marine Logistics Group (MLG) units adapted by simply continuing to defer security responsibilities to an element external to the motor transport platoon, which created its own set of problems.

In looking for a way ahead for doctrine, organization and equipment, the logical question is where does the mission for convoy security truly reside? It is here that the convoy security gap becomes apparent. There is no convoy security task as a standing task for military police MEF Law Enforcement Battalions according to the mission and tasks in the current T/O.³³

Direct support Combat Logistics Battalions in the MLG have a mission and tasks as follows:

MISSION. PROVIDE DIRECT SUPPORT, MEDIUM- AND HEAVY-LIFT MOTOR TRANSPORT SUPPORT AND MATERIALS AND CONTAINER HANDLING EQUIPMENT SUPPORT FOR THROUGHPUT AND SUSTAINMENT OPERATIONS OF AN INFANTRY REGIMENT. TASKS (1) PROVIDE DISTRIBUTION OF SUPPLIES, INCLUDING BULK LIQUIDS FOR THE INFANTRY REGIMENT. (2) PROVIDE PERSONNEL LIFT CAPABILITY FOR THE INFANTRY REGIMENT. (3) PROVIDE MHE SUPPORT BEYOND THE ORGANIC CAPABILITY OF SUPPORTED UNITS.³⁴

There is no task regarding security. There is only a peripheral mention of any type of security under Fires: "ORGANIC FIREPOWER IS LIMITED TO INDIVIDUAL AND CREW-SERVED WEAPONS FOR PERSONAL AND LOCAL SECURITY."³⁵ The task statement for Truck Company A, 2MARDIV is much the same: "PROVIDE MEDIUM TACTICAL VEHICLE SUPPORT FOR THE MOVEMENT OF PERSONNEL AND EQUIPMENT".³⁶

Analysis: Provisional Solutions to the Convoy Security Gap

Military Police as Convoy Escort

The author observed initially during OIF, 2nd Force Service Support Group (FSSG) utilized its abundance of military police from the Military Police Battalion to escort convoys due to a lack of other missions. However, this practice slowly became unsustainable during the transition from invasion to counterinsurgency, when increasing missions arose requiring specific military police skill sets. As a high-demand, low-density MOS, military police simply were not available to escort every logistics convoy in the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF). This was compounded when military police units were dispersed from the Marine Logistics Group (MLG) to the Marine Air Wing (MAW) and Marine Division. Military police have recently again been reorganized into Law Enforcement Battalions under the MEF Headquarters Group (MHG).³⁷

There are a number of issues created by relying on military police for convoy security. Perhaps the most significant is fact that convoy security is not part of the military police mission. In the MEF Headquarters Group Law Enforcement Battalion Table of Organization, the Task section states:

Conduct law enforcement and policing operations to include patrol/incident response operations, route regulation/enforcement, investigations, Joint Prosecution and Exploitation Center operations, Tactical Site Exploitation, identity operations/biometrics support, Protective Services operations, MWD operations, police intelligence, physical security and crime prevention expertise/assessments, accident investigations, customs/border clearance support operations, and MP support to civil authorities.³⁸

Nowhere in the mission or tasks of the Law Enforcement Battalion are the terms convoy security or convoy escort.

In his 2012 Marine Corps Gazette article, "Convoy Cops: The Predicament of MPs in the MLG", First Lieutenant Bobby Fowler addressed misuse of military police, specifically in the

MLG. Some of the key capabilities of military police companies that Fowler touches on are reconnaissance of new routes, main supply route (MSR) security patrols, EOD and wrecker escort, and enemy prisoner of war (EPW) internment operations. While he notes that convoy security has been a staple of MLG MP employment in recent years, he also points out that "convoy security is not, by doctrine, an MP mission. In fact, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-34, *Military Police in Support of the MAGTF* states, "Typically, military police do not provide logistics convoy escorts because they do not have the organic manpower to provide substantial security escorts." In discussing the CLB-6 OEF 10-1 deployment, he notes that CLB-6 was only allocated 19 military police Marines, one staff non-commissioned officer (SNCO), and two lieutenants. This section of Marines is insufficient to escort convoys for an entire motor transport company of a CLB. In what may be a sign of the MLG finally reconciling itself to a new reality of operating without the escorts of the old doctrine, CLB-6 had no security company for this deployment. Fowler states that "Bulk fuelers and truck drivers served as security leaders, and motor transport platoons conducted all security-related missions." He goes on to approve of their performance, saying that the structure of convoy security during the CLB-6 deployment proved that "with training and experience, non-MPs can perform convoy security for routine convoy missions."³⁹

Provisional Security Companies

Truck units that continued to rely on external convoy security companies faced three main issues: a continuous manpower drain of standing up a non-T/O company, the possible employment of under-trained Marines outside the wire, and problematic convoy command relationships. In 2008, CLB-8 deployed with a security company that was created with 8014

(any MOS) billets, and manned by a combination of military police and various MOSs from MLG units.⁴⁰ This is clearly not a long term, sustainable solution. During a time of manpower strain on the MLG to support multiple deployments, this solution strains units even further. Perhaps the true irony of this solution is that while drivers in the truck companies with multiple deployments are truly the most experienced, inexperienced Marines are being used in arguably the most high-risk capacity in the CLB, in the security company. Mistakes by Marines manning guns can have far reaching impacts well beyond the MLG mission. Compounding this problem of convoy and gunnery inexperience is the short lead time many units have to prepare Marines for deployment once they arrive. While composite security units may have arguably functioned well in the past, this course of action is a net detractor from unit cohesion, retention of lessons learned within the convoy community, and mission accomplishment of the convoy and the MLG a whole.

Continuing to rely on external convoy security also creates command relationship problems. In the author's experience as a FSSG truck platoon commander in 2004-2005, military police sections were continually rotated to support truck companies. A different section would appear at each convoy brief. Despite the tremendous amount of training within the truck platoon, cohesion and command relationships with the military police units were lacking, and often the escorting section would use new tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) that the truck platoon was not aware of. The escort section would also use a separate communications net. The end result was a convoy commander who was ultimately responsible for *everything* that occurred on the road (civilian deaths, friendly fire, accidents, etc) who was held accountable for the actions of Marines not under his or her command, and not exposed on a daily basis to the platoon training, SNCO mentorship or command philosophy. The use of an external unit for this

role introduced unnecessary impediments to unit training, communications, TTPs, and execution during the mission.

Self-Securing Truck Units

With a lack of MP support, some units like CLB-6 and 2nd and 1st Marine Division (MARDIV) Truck Companies took on security roles internally. This is true in both the author's experience as Truck Company Commander, 2MARDIV, and verified through interviews with the 2006 company commander of Truck Company 1MARDIV.⁴¹ The truck companies that absorbed the convoy security mission within truck platoons took on wholesale changes within the unit. In addition to duties of planning and execution of logistical movement, logistics officers took on the duties of security planning and execution once doctrinally reserved for a combat arms unit. Drivers became gunners and team members in specialized security vehicles. This shift to security roles changed everything - the requirement for better communications assets in trucks, the need for maneuverable security vehicles, gunnery training for drivers, restructuring of the convoy itself, co-opting of cargo vehicles for security roles, and creation of new equipment sets for cargo variant security vehicles.

As the experience of officers serving in units that have taken on convoy security increases, the idea that convoys should be completely self-securing is becoming a more accepted idea. However, the author has encountered senior officers who believe that security should be provided military police or other units. The mindset that an entire service is indoctrinated with over the course of decades can be very difficult to change.

The end result of this hole in our doctrine and organization is not only confusion of roles and tactics, but lack of equipment, lack of gunnery training, and lack economy of force in a

possibly fiscally constrained future. By failing to recognize and correct this problem, the Marine Corps risks willfully ignoring an all-too obvious reality. The patchwork solutions put in place over the past decade have undermined the mission writ large. Use of critical MOSs like military police monopolizes a specialized skill set in a role easily and more efficiently executed but the truck units themselves. Creating non-T/O units dramatically impacts manning and rotations across the MLG and undermines security force cohesion and proficiency. One of the strongest arguments that is seizing up any movement towards meaningful change in doctrine and organization is likely the idea that the need for convoy security is unique to Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Way Ahead

There are no solutions in the Transportation School's text book to the challenges we're facing here. What we're doing then, is really quite simple. We're just writing a new text book... If we are prepared to wage war and logistically support our forces under these conditions we must develop the material, personnel and systems best suited to the environment.⁴²

—8th Transportation Group 1967-1968, Colonel Joe Bellino, 1968

The convoy security gap must be filled by assigning this mission to unit Tables of Organization, by formally acknowledging what has been fact for the last decade – supply lines are a target in any form of warfare, and are a primary target in irregular warfare. The right unit to assume this mission is the unit that has in large part already been performing it for many years: motor transport companies. Mission statements and doctrine directly influence training requirements, ammunition allocations, equipment sets, and billets assigned to a unit. Changing the mission of motor transport units to encompass convoy security is a critical step towards preserving the lessons, institutionalizing the structure, and in avoiding the mistakes made after Vietnam in order to ensure effective and protected supply lines in future wars.

Personnel

The ability to utilize drivers in security roles provides benefits to both the unit and the Marine Corps. First and foremost, it ensures economy of force by allowing drivers and gunners to be interchanged for various convoy makeups and missions, and creating a measure of flexibility when Marines are injured or on leave. It gives the Marine Corps flexibility to maximize the amount of trucks on the road in low-threat environments (such as humanitarian assistance) by putting all drivers behind the wheel. If the environment suddenly changes, the unit does not require external augmentation or newly trained personnel – it can easily transition

to a more hardened posture by implementing gun trucks and moving the qualified gunners from the driver's seat to the turret. This change would relieve the Marine Corps of the degrading effects of continuously pulling Marines from other units to create ad hoc, often undertrained security companies.

A unit responsible for its own security also ensures a well-trained, cohesive platoon in which the best qualified Marines can earn roles in security vehicles, and all Marines in the convoy train together and are educated in all aspects convoy security and enemy TTPs. Security is never the concern of another unit. It also removes any doubt that the convoy commander is fully tactically responsible for the convoy, for the intelligence review and dissemination, for development of convoy TTPs, and for a training a tactically proficient platoon. Removal of the gray area of overlapping responsibilities with an external security commander prevents inadvertent intellectual laziness in platoon commanders who must now view themselves and solely and completely tactically responsible. Machine gun training will likely have to continue to reside with units vice formal schools. While training days are unlikely to be added to the motor transport entry-level curriculum in the current austere fiscal environment, measures such as unit gunnery evaluation standards are critical to holding logistics officers to a single standard of training for the platoon gunners.

Doctrine and Tactics

Once the security mission is assigned to truck units, the Marine Corps *Convoy Operations Handbook* needs an overhaul based on the lessons of Vietnam gun trucks and experience in OIF and OEF. Convoy security should be classified as two distinct types: (1) internal security intended purely for protection of the convoy and (2) external security

accompanying the convoy for the purpose of locating, attacking, and pursuing the enemy. The tactics, equipment sets, communications nets, and chains of command of these two types of security elements will be fundamentally different based on their two different missions. Vietnam gun trucks fulfilled the first mission: rescuing drivers from the kill zone, suppressing the enemy and providing first aid. The *Convoy Operations Handbook*, however, addresses the second mission, that of maneuvering against the enemy.

Equipment

Unequivocal assignment of the convoy security mission to truck units would necessitate a review of Tables of Equipment. Decision makers must closely review the equipment sets as they stand after OIF and OEF and determine what equipment truck units truly need to execute the full mission of running and protecting the convoy based on the tactics required for internal convoy security. Early in OIF, units lacked armor (which doctrinal combat arms escorts would notionally have) adequate communications equipment, and the necessary types of vehicles (such as M1114 HMMWVs in 2003) to provide security. They were simply not equipped for the mission. As a result, vehicles and equipment were borrowed, transferred and shipped in from the U.S. for truck companies. Planning for an austere future and an amphibious Corps, planners must analyze the revised mission and create a smart and flexible equipment set that provides protection and fire power of the right types in the right quantities based on a mission of internal security, not external security.

Conclusion

The motor transport community in the Marine Corps has been struggling with an identity crisis during the last 10 years of war. A key target of our enemies in Iraq and Afghanistan, convoys have operated under ad hoc tactics, equipment, and manning year after year during our nation's longest war. Hamstrung by outdated tactics, units relied on on-the-job training which varies greatly from unit to unit, based on the commander and the availability of ranges and ammunition. Convoy Marines have operated in the shifting sands of uncertain roles, dictated largely by the personalities of unit leadership. At the end of this decade of war, important changes have been made to tactics and equipment sets, but deeper institutional change has not come. The current convoy framework is built on a failing foundation set in the context of Cold War-era tactics and nonexistent structure.

Adhering to a Cold War-era ideal of the administrative convoy and failing to realize the lessons of Korea and Vietnam, the Marine Corps never structured unit tables of organization or tailored MOSs and training requirements to meet the realities of convoy security requirements. As a result, units deploying to Iraq or Afghanistan undertook three work-arounds to fill this structural gap. Division truck companies task-organized motor transport Marines into security roles. During OIF 1 and 2, the FSSG employed military police heavily as convoy security units, detracting from their primary mission and causing problematic command relationships within the convoy. MLG CLBs later resorted to creating ad hoc security companies from various MOSs prior to each deployment. Each of these three solutions came with its own problems, most significant of which are problematic convoy command relationships, the constant manpower

drain of standing up an "extra" company, and the employment of under-trained Marines outside the wire.

The case studies of the Korean War, the French War in Indochina and the American war in Vietnam demonstrated that in each case, units were caught completely unprepared and vulnerable to brutal attacks that threatened the entire mission at a strategic level. In each case, transportation units struggled to radically change their operations and equipment in order to catch up to an enemy who was well within our observe-orient-decide-act (OODA) loop. The tendency to focus on the ground combat units and disregard the requirement to secure supply lines is extremely powerful. This is evidenced well before the advent of motor transport during the American Indian wars and Napoleon's Russian campaign. This tendency is so powerful that after Korea, after Vietnam, and now at the end of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US military has failed to institutionalize convoy lessons that were paid for in blood.

As the Marine Corps looks to the future, and decides how to preserve the lessons of OIF and OEF, we face a security environment of increasing irregular threats and from both state and nonstate actors that can transition between conventional and irregular warfare. The Marine Corps as an institution must ensure that the allure of imagined strictly "conventional" war does not cause us to ignore the stark realities of numerous wars since World War II. Transportation units that are already manned, equipped and trained for the security mission give the commander flexible options, keep his supply lines open, and provide economy of force by reducing the drain on his combat arms forces. In order to be prepared to succeed in future conflicts, the Marine Corps should do as the French did and as our American predecessors in Vietnam did, and shift responsibility for the convoy security mission to transportation units.

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