

Melding Mechanized Assets and sUAS

Offensive-minded reconnaissance

by Capt Spencer S. Waters

“Information is valueless unless it be delivered to the commander in time for him to act on it. This means that reconnaissance elements must be speedier than the troops following them and must possess highly effective means of communication.”

—Major General Heinz Guderian¹

Reconnaissance elements in modern warfare have changed drastically with the expanding developments in small unmanned aircraft systems (sUAS), but the timeless principles from General Guderian remain the same. Providing reconnaissance in support of M1A1 tanks moving at an average of 25 kilometers per hour necessitates sUAS, which have extended range, endurance, and speed. By making substantial tactical improvements in implementing the RQ-20B Puma over the RQ-11B Raven, the Marine Corps now has a relevant sUAS that can keep up with tanks that seek to “close with and destroy the enemy by using armor-protected firepower, shock effect, and maneuver.”² The Raven’s limited range (10km), endurance

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The introduction of sUAS has changed the composition of reconnaissance units. (Photo by author.)

(90 minutes), and archaic fixed sensor have proven inadequate for maneuvering tanks. In an offensive engagement greater than ten kilometers, the utility of the Raven is negligible as soon as tanks are beyond its range.

It is no surprise to Marines today that sUAS technology is accelerating beyond its initial expectations. In light of lessons learned from Iraq and Syria, we understand the significance of countering commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) drones and emerging enemy sUAS tactics.³ The Marine Corps has sought to defend against this multi-dimensional threat using man-portable Drone-Defenders, improving early warning radars, and updating defensive counter air doctrine.⁴ Incorporating sUAS with our mechanized assets will aid in the development of defensive countermeasures concurrent with their infantry brethren; however, a rapid maneuvering tank force must prioritize the sUAS with respect to its offensive capabilities.

Doctrinal Effects

Marine Corps tank battalions are equipped with a scout and TOW platoon that provide “an organic mounted capability.”⁵ 1st Tank Battalion continues to retain these assets, but 2d Tank Battalion must request outside agencies to provide ground-based reconnaissance. Whether in combat or training, it is crucial to cover a tank battalion’s flanks and ensure resources are provided for effective reconnaissance. Additionally, Group 1 sUAS require minimal coordination outside of a unit’s fire support coordination center.⁶ The RQ-20B Puma can sufficiently find enemy flanks, locate obstacles, see dead-space in rural and urban areas, reconnoiter multiple routes simultaneously, provide observation for call for fire, conduct beyond-horizon targeting for fire support teams, and fill other roles traditionally held by scout platoons. In the near future, sUAS will *not* be able to fill the roles of the manned and armed scout platoon. If allocated correctly, enlarging the sUAS presence among tracked vehicles will undoubtedly *expand* the battalion’s reconnaissance ability.

Providing organic reconnaissance in the form of sUAS gives unit com-

manders an all-weather aerial reconnaissance capability. For instance, the cloud coverage over northern Norway is overcast to mostly cloudy 70 percent of the year.⁷ These conditions will often prohibit traditional UAS and fixed-wing multi-sensor imagery reconnaissance assets from effectively identifying and engaging targets throughout the battlespace. Because of their low visible and auditory signatures, sUAS can operate at much lower altitudes to provide effective multi-sensory imagery reconnaissance despite unceasing cloud coverage. If we truly want “persistent sensors above, on the flanks, and, at times, below our forces,” we ought to build the sUAS program and train sUAS operators at the lowest level.⁸

In the training employments of sUAS with tanks, intelligence, communications, and air, officers were able to not only provide realtime updates to the forward combat operations center with the RQ-20B but enable the networking on-the-move (NOTM) kit to receive the sUAS full motion video (FMV). With satellite communications, the NOTM kit is capable of transmitting sUAS FMV across the battlespace to provide re-

... sUAS technology is accelerating beyond its initial expectations.

altime reconnaissance. Additionally, tank commanders conducted force-on-force training in which the opposing force utilized sUAS. With this extra dimension added to the training, commanders were forced to develop methods for defeating and mitigating the enemy sUAS threat. The mere addition of sUAS to the enemy’s capabilities would alter the entire friendly scheme of maneuver. Lastly, even though the Puma has a larger physical footprint than the Raven with its multiple Pelican cases, this was determined to be a non-issue when launching the Puma from a forward combat operations center or with a tank company’s logistical

“The only thing that is unmanned with this system is a little teeny tiny piece of fiberglass that’s on the end of this very long, people-intensive spear.”

**—LtCol Bruce Black,
USAF⁹**

trains. The mere presence of the Puma during company training prompted the continuous development of inventive tactics, techniques, and procedures. By providing the M1A1 tank commanders with an equitable sUAS, we enhance their overall lethality, situational awareness, and confidence in battlespace management.

Manpower Concerns

Our peer, near-peer, and non-state adversaries’ use of sUAS is forcing American forces and our allies to *look up*. Nearly all of our enemies can provide guided munitions to attack our vehicles, planes, and bases through sophisticated and COTS sUAS. Therefore, by continuing to train Marines in acquiring FMV from a sUAS, we can establish a collective knowledge base in the GCE regarding the sUAS capabilities to creatively defend against this threat.

Recently, there has been a push to increase the size of the traditional twelve-man rifle squads in order to provide an additional Marine to act as a “squad systems operator”¹⁰ who could potentially improve sUAS capabilities at the rifle platoon and company level. Early in calendar year 2018, this movement, named “Quads for Squads,” sought to procure hundreds of quad-copters, specifically the Instant Eye, for every squad.¹¹ Unfortunately, because of cybersecurity concerns, this program has been temporarily halted, and the training for over 600 COTS handheld drones has been significantly delayed.¹² In order to build



The Marine Corps should consider increasing its number of sUAS operators by training using unit personnel. (Photo by author.)

its sUAS operator force, infantry units are training with the steadfast RQ-20B Puma and RQ-11B Raven, creating an outsized demand on sUAS operator training. Prioritizing and diversifying these limited opportunities across the GCE is inherently difficult, and these few class seats are a limiting factor to the Corps' sUAS training. Regardless of whether Instant Eye and other COTS sUAS are approved to fly again in the next calendar year, there is no question that our Commandant's guidance to increase our sUAS capabilities has put increased demands on our contracts with the personnel aboard training and logistics support activity (TALSA) facilities. The near-term resolution to this problem is simple: increase the class seats of initial sUAS operator training, and develop TALSA operations to the maximum extent possible.

By increasing our sUAS presence and demanding the requisite knowledge needed to operate these assets safely, we must consider aviation safety and the increased potential for mid-air collisions with rotary and tilt-rotor aircraft. Because producing more forward air controllers (FACs) infringes on the limited manpower of our pilot population, the

answer for reducing/mitigating these aviation safety risks is to *immediately* surge our population of joint fires observers (JFOs). This resolution is no surprise to the formal trainers of Marine JFOs, who constantly seek to promote their program to unit commanders. The JFO's role is much the same of sUAS operators, a customarily ground-centric Marine who has received formal

Traditionally, sUAS operators come from our intelligence personnel ...

courses regarding aircraft deconfliction and airspace management. Whether it is managing final attack headings for CAS, acquiring targeting data, recommending weapon-to-target solutions, or understanding the three-dimensional problems of routing aircraft, JFOs unquestionably serve a vital role in providing an air support expertise to the GCE. JFOs inherently have working relationships with their respective FACs or joint

tactical air controllers (JTACs) and can provide necessary supervision to sUAS operations. In a tank or rifle company, the high-demand, low-volume FACs/JTACs cannot always be at the point of aviation friction. Therefore, talented and forward-thinking Marines who possess technical skills and high levels of proficiency should be recommended for sUAS and JFO training.

To compound this aviation safety problem, unit commanders often do not prioritize this JFO and sUAS training because manning numbers for these personnel are not tracked via the Defense Readiness Reporting System. This largely affects personnel quality control because commanders often do not account for whether sUAS operators are current or whether their JFOs have completed their vital battalion-organized designation phase of training. If our Corps wants *safe*, numerous, and proficient aviation experts in the GCE, we need to monetarily boost the training facilities designed for sUAS operators and JFOs and prioritize these programs by requiring formal reports via the Defense Readiness Reporting System.

As for micro-manpower decisions specific to tank battalions, Marines who operate with a tank company's logistical/combat trains should be considered for sUAS training. Traditionally, sUAS operators come from our intelligence personnel, and rightfully so, considering their prescribed collections instruction. However, by incorporating Marines at the lowest level possible, we can build the corporate sUAS awareness. This will create journeyman and apprentice relationships between the battalion's intelligence and air officers and provide decentralized resources and aviation experts for tank unit commanders.¹³

On the Way

The future of sUAS and mechanized forces will develop concurrent with emergent technologies, and the top-down dissemination of improved aircraft will meet the new needs of unit commanders. Tank and rifle companies alike still seek extended times-on-station, higher fidelity electro-optical/infrared sensors, reduced equipment footprints, functionality with tacti-

cal tablets, increased range, and—of course—some type of munition. The primary purposes of Air Force UAS assets are to: (1) provide reconnaissance and intercept electronic emissions, and (2) provide “light attack” capabilities.¹⁴ Without question, Marines on the ground would love for the Corps’ UAS program to adopt the light-attack purpose. In a perfect world, Marines would own and operate a sea-deployable UAS comparable to the MQ-9 Reaper, which could provide 30+ hours of direct support multi-spectral intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; communications relay capabilities; and *offensive* air support capabilities.¹⁵ Group 1 sUAS most likely will not delve into CAS capabilities in the near term, but this ever-present need to *destroy* with sUAS could be facilitated with improvements to the established AeroVironment Switchblade, a disposable Kamikaze-like guided sUAS.¹⁶

For range, developments in beyond visual line-of-sight can radically increase the reach of sUAS with advanced autopilot technologies, detailed 3D mapping, and more powerful communications links. The technology exists for satellites to relay ground control station inputs to the aircraft, to the point where the sUAS is only limited by its battery and maximum flight time. With a sUAS no longer limited by its communications link, an aircraft can be available for the possibility of being tasked between separate units. Lastly, beyond visual line-of-sight can also make sUAS operations safer, considering the requirements to be seen and tracked on regional radars and satellites.¹⁷

In capabilities, expect sUAS to perform advanced signals intelligence and electronic warfare functions, counter and detect improvised explosive devices, and provide a defensive against chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear threats. The next generation of sUAS must be easily compatible with all tactical tablet applications such as KILSWITCH and the improvement of digitally aided CAS concepts. As a communications relay, sUAS must be able to provide VHF/UHF and ANW2 communication relay payloads. In the same way tanks can outrun sUAS coverage

when using the smaller RQ-11B Raven, tracked vehicles can also outrun line-of-sight communications capabilities, and relays would prove vital in maneuver warfare tasks. In the near future, the current RQ-20B will need to improve its battery life for extended time-on-station, and hopefully the next-generation RQ-20B will increase its wind envelope to improve its all-weather abilities and infrared night sensor capabilities.

In Closing

Our next major fight will not include warfighting, where we have been able to assume air superiority. In many ways, our near-peer adversaries have matched and surpassed us in sUAS and mechanized asset integration. Developing and improving our tank platoons’ capability to maintain tactical relevance is of the utmost strategic importance to our Corps and our allies. To enable effective sUAS for our Marines leading mechanized forces, our Corps ought to prioritize JFO and sUAS operator training efforts to reflect the intent of the Commandant,¹⁸ maintain and improve doctrinal relevance into the near future, and provide adequate, timely, and decentralized intelligence and reconnaissance to key decision makers.

Notes

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Effective Training for Intelligence Specialists

Setting our Marines up for success

by 1stLt Ben M. Kallas

It would be hard to argue that the training provided to 0231 intelligence specialists—the enlisted intelligence Marines who provide the backbone for all-source intelligence in the Marine Corps—sets them up for success in a combat environment. Perhaps it did twenty years ago, before the proliferation of the Internet and unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) precipitated an exponential increase in the volume of available information. This trend will continue, and our junior intelligence Marines are not prepared for it. This is not their fault. Their current situation stems from a combination of inadequate entry-level training and the widespread inability of intelligence shops to conduct training in a garrison environment. This article addresses both issues but focuses primarily on entry-level training because a fundamental restructure of the MAGTF Intelligence Specialist Entry-level Course (MISEC) curriculum will allow intelligence shops to conduct advanced training rather than teach the basic skills these Marines should have already mastered at the schoolhouse. I have drawn from both personal experience—at a regimental-level intelligence shop and a deployment to Helmand Province, Afghanistan—and conversations with Marine intelligence professionals across a broad range of ranks and responsibilities.

Framing the Problem

Modern technology is creating an unprecedented need for intelligence Marines who can understand a complex

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Are we setting our Marines up for success? (Photo by Sgt James Trevino.)

battlefield, navigate among an array of databases and live information feeds, quickly prioritize the most relevant information, and present that information in a concise manner. When the mission is expeditionary, manpower and resources are constrained; this means that a single 0231 must fill multiple roles. This was very much the case throughout the first rotation of Task Force SOUTHWEST in Helmand Province.

However, intelligence shops within infantry units rarely have access to the resources required to train their Marines for intelligence support to combat operations. The remainder of this section addresses two issues, both of which need to be resolved if 0231s' skills are to expand rather than atrophy. First, exercises are so infantry-centric that they provide no training value to intelligence shops. Second, training outside of exercises is

unrealistic given the lack of resources and the non-intelligence-related duties assigned to intelligence shops in a garrison environment. It is a necessity to have a strong entry-level training pipeline for 0231s, as intelligence training opportunities in the Operating Forces will remain limited for the foreseeable future.

Battalion- and regimental-level exercises are designed to improve infantry skills, and they do that quite well. Not so for intelligence. The essence of intelligence support in operations is collecting information, monitoring information provided by outside sources, identifying what is relevant, and synthesizing it into a coherent picture for the commander. In the real world, most information is irrelevant, contradictory, deliberately false, or only helpful when combined with other scraps of information from days or months ago. When an exercise turns a portion of a U.S. military base into a theoretical “country” and renames the towns, it does not begin to replicate the complexity and confusion of a conflict zone. There is no true backstory to the enemy or civilian population, no means of adequately replicating intelligence inputs from the plethora of U.S. intelligence collection platforms, and no means of generating an information overload situation. Instead, intelligence “injects” are scarce and transparently intended to drive the commander to make a decision. This is useful to the infantry Marines because the intelligence inject will prompt them to conduct an operation, but it does nothing for the analytical or research skills of intelligence Marines.

Intelligence shops fare little better in garrison. Most are primarily tasked with security management, a broad field which includes the handling of all classified information, teaching others how to handle such information, administrative management of all security clearances held by battalion personnel, and so on. The time requirement here is considerable. Factor in the typical drains on manpower—working parties, medical hit lists, required MarineNet classes, and Marines on leave—and one rarely finds a critical mass of intelligence Marines present for meaningful

training. Not that it would necessarily help much; most battalions have just two or three classified (i.e., the secure internet protocol router) computers, so access to intelligence sources is severely limited. For all the talk about the value of open-source (unclassified) information—which does have its merits—intelligence is inextricably tied to the availability of classified networks. While Regional Intelligence Training Centers exist, and are designed to offset these limitations, a combination of unit operational tempo and limitations to class size continue to limit their positive impact.

These are institutional issues that will not be resolved in the near future. They would be less of a concern if junior-enlisted intelligence Marines were already competent in the core skills they need to thrive in a combat environment by the time they graduate basic training and arrive at their unit. At present, MISEC is not structured to provide such skills. In comparison to the broader issues across the Operating Forces, restructuring MISEC is a relatively easy fix—and one that will posture new 0231s to succeed even without effective training at their unit.

Intelligence Training for the 21st Century

The MISEC instructor cadre has agreed for years that the curriculum needs to change. The current course relies heavily on the rote memorization of a fire hose of information, teaches intelligence “programs of record” which have been obsolete for years instead of programs that are actually used by intelligence professionals, and places little emphasis on research or analytical skills. However, major changes would take time and approval from Training and Education Command—and an extension of the course’s length has remained off the table for years. A review of all basic intelligence courses is already underway, so the following paragraphs provide a template for a more effective course that teaches the necessary intelligence skills in a realistic time frame as well as a few of the challenges inherent to MISEC. It is more radical than what is currently under consideration and

also incorporates aspects of the Ground Intelligence Officer Course (GIOC) curriculum as a means of comparison.

Instructors at MISEC will face two enduring difficulties. First, junior Marines’ military experience is limited to recruit training and a few weeks of basic infantry training by the time they enter the course. Most have no other military experience and little or no relevant work experience with which to contextualize the concepts they learn at the course. Second, the Marines’ educational experience is highly variable. I need not elaborate on the quality of high schools across the United States to explain that most have not received much training in reading, writing, analysis, or information retention. Nonetheless, as the prerequisites for intelligence positions within the broader U.S. intelligence community make clear, such skills are critically important. These are not insurmountable challenges, but they must factor into the course structure.

Contrast this situation with Marine officers entering GIOC: All are college graduates, many of whom have previous work experience. They were selected for (and passed) Officer Candidates School, graduated from The Basic School, received three months of intensive infantry training at the Infantry Officer Course, and learned about scout/sniper employment for another three weeks. By the time they enter GIOC, they are qualified infantry officers with at least four years of academic experience in college and nearly thirteen months of increasingly intense military training, and yet, the three months of GIOC instruction is essentially a sprint. Many workdays last fourteen to eighteen hours, and work on weekends is common. For the junior Marines at MISEC, that tempo is neither sustainable nor legal. Burnout and suicidal ideations would become endemic. To be sure, not all of the course material at GIOC is applicable to MISEC; there is a heavier emphasis on operational planning and analysis. However, most of the course-work focuses on skills that both 0203s and 0231s will perform in the Operating Forces.

The overlap in course material occurs so that officers can reinforce those

skills among their 0231s (which often does not happen—refer to the previous section) and so that officers can perform those tasks themselves when necessary. To expect junior Marines with comparatively limited academic and military experience to obtain proficiency in similar skills sets, in the same period of time, while working half the hours per day, is not remotely realistic. Thus, MISEC needs to be extended to six months. This will create some manpower and logistical issues, since doubling the length of the course will halve the number of courses that can be taught in a given year. Barracks space for students will also have to increase considerably, which is no small issue but hardly one that should permanently limit the course to an unrealistic time-frame.

Most junior Marines receive minimal writing instruction before they enter the Corps and little or none afterwards. In most occupations, this is not a major issue. In the intelligence field, it is. How many junior 0231s have excellent ideas and an intuitive understanding of the battlespace but cannot articulate those thoughts on paper? It is not sustainable for the officers or the intelligence chief to write every sentence that is disseminated by the intelligence shop, and it should not be necessary. Junior Marines' writing can improve dramatically in a short time—again, personal experience—and it should be taught at the schoolhouse. The first month should focus partially on a few introductory classes but primarily on an intensive writing program. The subject matter is irrelevant; what matters is that Marines are uniformly taught to use proper grammar and syntax so that they can confidently put words on paper. They would all understand how to make a clear and succinct point by the end of the month. We train infantry Marines to use rifles, but we do not teach intelligence Marines to use words.

Once Marines have a grasp of writing fundamentals, they will learn about intelligence. The second month will provide an overview of each intelligence discipline—human (HUMINT), geo-spatial (GEOINT), signals (SIGINT), open-source (OSINT), and measure-

ment and signature (MASINT). Emphasis will be placed on the first three, as multiple OSINT courses exist in the Operating Forces and MASINT has limited applicability to forward deployed units. Students will learn about the types of products and reports associated with each discipline, with as much hands-on experience as possible. They will also learn about the various databases associated with each discipline: where to find HUMINT and SIGINT reporting, satellite imagery, and so on. A firm grasp of the available intelligence sources is critical to the rest of the course.

Instructors must have the latitude to provide hands-on training ...

Marines will begin to tie their newfound knowledge together in the third month, which will focus on programs used across the intelligence community to pull in, track, and fuse multiple information sources into a coherent picture. This is the key function of all-source intelligence and a task that 0231s are uniformly unable to perform upon graduation from MISEC. This is partly because the instructors are required to teach hopelessly outdated “programs of record” like FalconView, which is analogous to teaching a course about the power of social media by showing students how to use Hotmail and Instant Messenger.

Instructors must have the latitude to provide hands-on training with the programs 0231s will encounter in the Operating Forces and the broader intelligence community. Google Earth is widely used for intelligence purposes, so either that program or its upcoming replacement will be a necessity. Next should come Palantir, which combines the power of a multi-disciplinary search engine with the ability to store and link information in a collaborative manner. Finally, 0231s should learn the analytical tool set provided by the Joint Improvised-Threat Defeat Organization (JIDO)—the Attack the

Network Tool Suite (ANTS). These tools are specifically designed to simplify all-source research and analysis in a time-constrained, low-bandwidth combat environment.

The first three months progressively cover broad skill sets that any all-source intelligence professional should have. In the fourth month, the Marines will begin to look at specific collection platforms and common enemy threat weapons. There is no need to cover every platform in depth, but a basic understanding of common UAS, satellites, ground reconnaissance and surveillance units, and signals collection systems is a requirement so that analysts know the capabilities and limitations of the platforms that provide the information they receive. This sets realistic expectations regarding the information they should expect to be available and also cues them to request additional collection to support their analysis. This month can be a hands-on experience for the students; there are enough case studies and realtime data feeds available to make this happen.

Common threat weapons are covered in depth at GIOC, and experience strongly suggests that MISEC needs to dedicate additional time to it. Intelligence is focused on the enemy, and weapons are what the enemy uses to kill friendly forces. Yet few junior 0231s realize that the AK-47 is actually a rather rare weapon; the later AKM or its Chinese and Yugoslavian variants are far more common. Recognizing those variants may indicate the logistical networks that an enemy employs. The difference between an enemy unit with RPKs (Soviet light machine gun) and one with PKMs (a general-purpose Kalashnikov machine gun) can be a life-and-death distinction. Understanding the difference between generations of man-portable air defense systems is an even more serious matter. Like collection platforms, it is unrealistic to cover everything, but a decent introduction is necessary.

The current MISEC curriculum focuses heavily on intelligence preparation of the battlespace (IPB), a highly structured approach to understanding the weather, enemy, and terrain within



Time should be spent teaching Marines how to write effectively. (Photo by LCpl Laura Mercado.)

a battlespace prior to a deployment or mission. This is understandable, as IPB requires a diverse set of skills and, therefore, exercises a broad range of intelligence-related tasks. The problem is that students are minimally prepared before they are tasked to prepare an IPB brief; per the current curriculum, IPB is introduced at the beginning of the third week. I would not introduce such a comprehensive project until the fifth month, by which point the Marines can write, understand all of the disciplines of all-source intelligence, find the relevant products and reports, employ programs to harness all of that information, and understand the significance of common enemy weapons.

Thus, the fifth month incorporates all of the basic skills they have learned and translates it into the first comprehensive intelligence product of the course. This month will also incorporate lessons on how to effectively portray information on PowerPoint slides (as much as senior officers seem to hate it, every brief still involves PowerPoint) and how to brief an audience. Greater emphasis goes toward slide-building than briefing, as officers or an intelligence chief tend to give the briefs. That said, the best way to learn to build a good briefing slide is to build slides—and brief them to a harsh audience at

the schoolhouse. A professional-looking brief will always appear more credible than a sloppy one that contains the same information.

Month six wraps up the course with intelligence support to targeting, followed by a final exercise. Targeting is integral to any combat operation and is always driven by intelligence. The first two weeks of the month will introduce deliberate targeting (pre-planned strikes on enemy positions) and high-value individual (HVI) targeting. The latter is almost exclusively tied to counterinsurgency, which is less prominent in today's Corps than it was in past years. Still, HVI targeting remains common—even among conventional forces—in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, and it will likely regain prominence in future conflicts.

A final exercise will incorporate all of the skills that students learned during the course. It will be based on a real-world scenario and incorporate an in-depth IPB. Students will have to fuse inputs from multiple intelligence disciplines and employ intelligence programs like Google Earth, Palantir, and JIDO's ANTS. Once the IPB is complete, students will support both deliberate and HVI targeting. Each event will be graded and critiqued by the instructors. By the end of the course, students will have learned and employed all of the

basic skills they need to succeed in any combat environment.

Conclusion

I sought to make two points with this article: that junior 0231s are not provided anywhere near the level of training they need to succeed in modern combat environments and that this need not be the case. MISEC is the same length as GIOC, despite the fact that GIOC students are all academically experienced, were screened for their MOS, received almost a year of increasingly intense training beforehand, and work nearly twice the hours of MISEC students during the course. 0231 Intelligence Specialists are capable of learning a great deal in a short time; I watched them provide intelligence support that rivaled that of special operations units in Afghanistan. But it took time, in a combat environment where lives were at stake. That is not the place to learn intelligence. That place is the schoolhouse, and we are presently failing them in that regard.

The course structure I just outlined is six months long, and it does not demand the same rigor or breadth of subjects as the GIOC curriculum. But six months is a more realistic amount of time to impart the basic skills that junior 0231s will need to hit the ground running upon graduation, as they are unlikely to receive much in the way of sustainment training after that. Even if intelligence training someday becomes a priority in the Operating Forces, we owe it to our junior Marines to dramatically increase the quality of education we provide them. Lives and wars depend upon their ability to support operations, and now is the time to make long-overdue changes to their basic training.



The EAS Marine

Corps culture and its effects on retention

by Capt Yosef E. Adiputra

“Who here is planning on getting out?” asked a senior Marine officer during a small scheduled gathering at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, NC. Silence consumed the air. Heads swiveled and eyes darted all across the room. I raised my hand high, feeling confident I could answer any question regarding my plan. I scanned the room, looking for signs of support, but I was alone. Instead of constructing my next response, my mind frantically raced with thoughts of not just confusion but of shame and disloyalty. Was I really the only person adamant on transitioning? Or was there a certain stigma associated with the EAS (expiration of active service) Marine that hindered the very thought of getting out?

The Marine Corps does a phenomenal job of creating an exclusive “members-only” culture, often referred to as the “Gun Club.” While civilian employers crave the ability to create such a culture, the Marine Corps has effortlessly developed organizational cohesion, or *esprit de corps*, without the support of civilian management consultants. Take a twenty-minute drive around the town surrounding a Marine Corps base, and you will inevitably find Eagle, Globe, and Anchor bumper stickers stamped across most vehicles. The Marine Corps achieves this through personal senses of patriotic duty, exciting promises of travel, outstanding leadership, and the ever-famous GI Bill, guaranteeing those who enlist a chance to transition out with free education and opportunities for employment. You would be hard-pressed to find similar displays of company pride with employees of Walmart, the second-largest employer in the U.S. (second only to the Federal Government).



What impact can this Marine's comments have on the Marine Corps and how we view our Marines? (Photo by LCpl Sean P. Cummins.)

The Marine Corps thus does an excellent job attracting outsiders to sign up. But underneath the surface, the issue of retention and force strength has always been paramount in the eyes of the upper echelons of Marine leadership and Congress. Numerous proposals attempt to increase retention through higher incentive bonuses, better marketing campaigns, and even enacting a retirement plan that mimics the civilian 401K plan. However, these solutions are short term. In a 2010 study, researchers found that happiness increases with income, but only up to the \$75,000 annual salary.¹ The correct adage is not “Money can't buy happiness” but

rather “Money can only buy so much happiness. After that, we need to find something else.”

So, if money isn't the heart of the issue, could there be something embedded in the culture of the EAS Marine that contributes to our retention? Let's view this issue through the lens of our majority, or “working class,” which includes of our junior ranks from private to lance corporal/corporal.

After three and a half years of honorable service (for the majority of enlisted Marines), a Marine will have endured the rigors of field exercises, shop inspections, field days, working parties, and deployments. After this time, the fork in the road begins to present itself: either EAS from the current contract and use the GI Bill to pursue post-military goals, or remain with the Corps for an additional four years. It is a process that every Marine knows and understands, whether from a leadership perspective

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or a junior Marine's. But a strange yet common phenomenon begins to occur after that Marine makes his decision to depart. Those leaders who developed and mentored that EAS Marine will slowly begin to drift away from him. This sentiment can often turn into scorn and disdain, as leadership associates that Marine with such characteristics as laziness, selfishness, and detachment because of his decision to leave. The inspiration and encouragement that was once provided to that Marine is replaced with relentless orders to stand duty, serve as an "extra body" for field exercises, and perform a steady stream of menial tasks in an attempt to squeeze every last minute of his contract out of him. Over time, this antagonism begins to flow back up the chain of command, particularly to the immediate leaders such as the platoon commander or platoon sergeant, on an even more aggressive scale. And in a New York minute, a toxic climate is

born, permeating through every line of rank in the unit.

The counterargument to this is that a Marine who has made his decision to EAS will often have the full blessing of his leadership to pursue a proper transition by attending transition

Over time, this antagonism begins to flow back up the chain of command ...

readiness seminars, conducting job interviews, and developing employment opportunities. While there is certainly some merit to this claim, in reality, stories of Marines attending these seminars the month before EAS or participating in month-long field

exercises in their transition season are all too common.

Our inability to sympathize with Marines transitioning out has helped to create the veteran employment dilemmas that we often see today. The neglect we show Marines who transition will eventually resonate among companies and platoons, as horror stories from seasoned Marines are passed down to more junior Marines.

The very exclusivity that attracted Marines to join the Corps will be the same one that shuns them from their leadership after they make the decision to leave. Sometimes, we simply don't have the time to worry about the development of our EAS Marines. While there is certainly no short-term benefit in helping those who are surely leaving the organization, there is an unquestionable long-term effect in the overall organizational culture. If leaders continue the culture of disregard toward their departing members, Marines will

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view this as a breakdown of leadership trust, and newly arrived Marines will have a biased, preconceived notion that the officers and SNCOs run a playbook inspired by self-interest and eventual alienation.

If you join any group of conversing Marines around a smoke pit, you will undoubtedly hear of the fallacies of the “Marine Corps system.” While the arguments seem endless, many professed problems ultimately point toward one simple solution. During my personal tour as a platoon commander, I mentored scores of Marines who all had different aspirations in either their military career or their personal lives. In one particular anecdote, a corporal reluctantly expressed his desire to EAS during a private conversation in my office. To his surprise, I spent additional time with him in preparing his résumé, researching career goals, and improving his professional credentials. This simple act of compassion radiated across the platoon, and Marines began seeing themselves as valuable assets of the unit instead of contracted government workers. This shift in perception of the Marine Corps leadership convinced not only that corporal but also nearly 40 percent of my deployment platoon to reenlist. Opponents of this investment will point to the folly of focusing our efforts and hours on those who will not provide long-term value, but a Marine who is valued on a more holistic basis



This is their last deployment. What's next for them? (Photo by LCpl Tojyea Matally.)

warfare continues to evolve, and as the needs of the Marine Corps require a more diverse skill set, we must match these needs with an equally impressive system of managing our skillful workers and the intellectual capital they may provide. Google uses the title “People Operations” to describe their human resources department, which has turned the global leader into the shining city upon a hill by which other companies measure employee climate and loyalty. By viewing our employees with more worth than a “table of organization and equipment number,” we can improve

The leaders of the Marine Corps need to re-evaluate their own people operations, which should treat Marines of all career stages (recruit, transitioning, or careerist) not simply as government property or commodity numbers but rather as the most treasured resources of an elite warfighting organization. Warren Buffet famously said that “someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.” For the Marine Corps, this proverbial shade is not only the personal and professional well-being of an individual Marine but also the lasting impacts that he will make on the institution and on the battlefield.

By viewing our employees with more worth than a “table of organization and equipment number,” we can improve not only the quality of the force but, over the long term, the retention as well.

will feel a better sense of personal responsibility and pride. This, of course, translates into better work quality, a better employee climate, and a stronger devotion to the institution.

To transform the way we view human resources, we may spend a few extra hours on our management tasks for seemingly trivial gains. But as modern

not only the quality of the force but, over the long term, the retention as well. While I absolutely agree that the Marine Corps is rooted in very different operational goals than those of Google, I refuse to believe that its system of management cannot be modernized with the same resolve and importance as our weapons and equipment.

Note

1. Daniel Kahneman and Angus Deaton, “High income improves evaluation of life but not emotional well-being,” *National Center for Biotechnology Information*, (Online: September 21 2010), available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>.

