

A Cold Weather LCE

The justification

by Maj Mark Wlaschin

In the 1980s, the United States was on the brink of war with a well-known enemy. The Soviet Union had been a national threat long before 1946, making it a primary concern of the Marine Corps for more than 40 years. In this potential war against the Soviet empire, the Marine Corps, in support of our NATO allies, planned to deploy an MEB-sized force to defend the northern flank of Norway. This force would plug the snowy gap, stopping the south-bound onslaught of Soviet mechanized forces, as NATO reinforcements surged to assist. The problem, however, was that as a “generalist” force, Marines had been historically expected to be able to operate regardless of the environment. Recognizing the inherent difficulty and unique challenges of cold weather operations, Marine Corps leadership decided to take a different approach to its Title X responsibility to man, train, and equip the Corps. Instead of continuing to rotate sporadic infantry battalions through cold weather training at the MCMWTC near Bridgeport, CA, an entire infantry regiment was designated a “Cold Weather Regiment,” with only its battalions being sent to cold weather training and exercises both domestically and abroad. The 2d Marine Regiment received and maintained this designation until the terrorist attacks on 9/11, when the focus of the entire Marine Corps shifted to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A similar discussion is occurring right now. Current Marine Corps leadership, concerned about saber-rattling around the Arctic, is again looking for a way to ensure that Marine forces are capable of successfully operating in cold weather and extreme cold weather environments.¹ Fifteen years of desert warfare, multiple after-action reports from cold weather exercises,² and numerous recent

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We need to make sure we are capable of successfully operating in cold weather environments. (Photo by author.)

articles³ have all supported the recognition of the Marine Corps’ reduced proficiency at fighting in freezing temperatures. The last time the Marine Corps was this unprepared to fight in cold temperatures, it experienced disaster in the Chosin Reservoir, where approximately 900 Marines and Sailors were killed or missing, 3,500 were wounded, and more than 6,500 received non-battle injuries, primarily from frostbite.⁴ Determined to prevent history from repeating itself, it has been suggested that an infantry regiment should be designated as the cold weather regiment once more. As these important discussions occur, it is this author’s position that recent experiences in Bridgeport and Norway have shown that there is a parallel urgent and vital requirement that needs to also be

considered—a cold weather designated LCE.

One of the few shortcomings of the decision to designate 2d Marines as the cold weather infantry regiment was that there was no designated cold weather Force Service Support Group⁵ unit similarly identified. This lack of recognition that the Marine Corps operates as a MAGTF could have resulted in disaster if the Marine Corps had been called to protect Norway’s northern flank. While there would have been infantrymen with significant cold weather experience, there would not have been any of the vital support personnel with cold weather experience. This capabilities gap would have made an already dreadful situation fighting Soviet troops all the more untenable.

Unfortunately, this lack of recognition of the most basic of Marine employment concepts continues today. The recently-drafted *Force Management Plan* identifies a specific number of cold weather infantry battalions without mentioning the other three parts of the MAGTF that also need cold weather training for a MAGTF to fight and win.⁶ The critical cold weather training requirements of the command element and ACE warrant a close examination as well, but these are not within the scope of this article.

It is important to acknowledge that the LCE unit receiving the designation as the cold weather unit would not be the sole unit providing support during a “real-world” operation in a cold weather environment, especially during sustained combat operations. Similarly, in the 1980s, it was not assumed that only 2d Marines would be sent to Norway during a NATO conflict with the Soviets. This, however, does not diminish the need or justification for such a designation as it will ensure that the unit increases its experience and familiarity with cold weather operations, retains and improves a standardized skillset, and acts as an advocate for the rest of the logistics community. As Marines move through their careers, they could rotate back to this unit in different billets or be placed in other units, spreading their wealth of cold weather experiences and knowledge across the combat service support (CSS) community.

The merits of formally designating a cold weather LCE are numerous. The unit would provide a core of CSS personnel who provide support in an exceptionally unique and challenging environment. The unit would be expected to support the two winter mountain exercises which occur between January and March each year at the MCMWTC. They would provide detachments to support deployments for training in Norway, Canada, and throughout the southern hemisphere during winter months. They would test equipment capabilities for Marine Corps Systems Command and the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab, with a focus on CSS-specific items. Additional courses, such as Winter Moun-



Don't assume that only 2d Marines would be sent to Norway during a NATO conflict. (Photo by MCMWTC 2d Supply Battalion.)

tain Leaders Course, Animal Packers Course, Cold Weather Medicine, and Mountain Communications Course, would be programmatically provided to the unit leadership to enhance individual and unit proficiency as well.

The unit leadership would be trained on maritime prepositioning force (MPF) operations and become intimately familiar with the operation and function of the cave systems that make up the Marine Corps Pre-Positioning-Norway (MCPN) and the Norwegian transportation network. This would be required as plans in cold weather or extreme cold weather environments in Marine Forces Europe/Africa and Marine Forces Pacific call for the employment of MPF shipping. The unique nature of the MCPN cave system and transportation systems and requirements in Norway are complex enough that they should not be learned after a conflict has already begun.

This unit would not only become familiar with cold weather CSS operations but would also assist in writing numerous cold weather CSS training manuals and after-action reports. During their cold weather experiences, they will be expected to submit product quality deficiency reports, deliberate universal needs statements, and suggested changes to technical manuals as

capability shortfalls are discovered and Service-wide corrections are identified. All of these documents and literature would be vital to successful CSS operations in a kinetic fight in a cold weather or extreme cold weather operation.

Now knowing what this cold weather designated LCE would do, the next question is which unit should it be. One might initially think that a direct support (DS) combat logistics battalion (CLB), such as CLB-2, should be the one designated. After all, DS CLBs typically support infantry regiments when part of a MAGTF and would have the most to gain by focusing on cold weather training. Intense current operational requirements for all DS CLBs, however, would make their designation purely administrative in nature—they would have little impact on their actual cold weather proficiency or ability to conduct any of the other tasks listed above. Therefore, the designated unit should be a DS combat logistics regiment (CLR).

Having a DS CLR designated as the cold weather LCE allows the requisite personnel management and shuffling to shift personnel with cold weather experience or training (Winter Mountain Leaders Course, etc.) into whichever subordinate battalion or company is slated for cold weather training, DFTs, etc. As there are cold weather operations



Marines must be capable of functioning in cold weather. (Photo by MCMWTC 2d Supply Battalion.)

and training requirements across Marine Forces Europe/Africa and Marine Forces Pacific, it seems as though CLR-1, CLR-2, and CLR-3 all have equal justification for the designation as the cold weather LCE, but designating more than one CLR could dilute the effectiveness of the effort while creating multiple stovepipes of effort. Instead, CLR-1 should be designated the sole cold weather LCE for the Marine Corps.

CLR-1's close proximity to the Marine Corps' primary cold weather training location, the MCMWTC, will keep transportation costs extremely low in comparison to the other CLRs. Additionally, any unit deploying to Norway to provide exercise or operational sup-

port will fly there and use MCPP-N or MPF equipment, which will eliminate concerns that the cost of transporting a large quantity of trucks, containers, and equipment overseas will overcome savings made elsewhere. Others might have concerns about the employment of a Camp Pendleton-based CLR, which falls under I MEF, operating in support of II MEF units in Norway or III MEF units in South Korea, but far more complex command relationships have been executed for more than a decade in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁷

The publishing of a Marine administrative message followed by a ceremony declaring CLR-1 as the Marine Corps cold weather designated LCE cannot



Keeping transportation costs low is one factor to consider when designating a cold weather CLR. (Photo by MCWTC MIX 1-16.)

be the end of this discussion—it should only be the beginning. A close examination of the Marine Corps task list and all CSS MOS training and readiness manuals is required to identify conditions-based standards and the means and locations by which they can be sustained along with a multitude of other implied tasks. The sooner this is done, the sooner CLR-1 can begin to take advantage of the cold weather training opportunities at the MCMWTC and in Norway. Our adversaries already have a head start. Will the Marine Corps show that it can learn on its own, or will it require a modern-day cold weather disaster on the scale of the Chosin Reservoir campaign before it is shocked into action? Time, and history, will tell.

Notes

1. See *Marine Corps Training Pamphlet 12-10A, Mountain Warfare Operations*, (Bridgeport, CA: MCMWTC: February 2014). The temperature categories are: Wet Cold: +39 °F to +20 °F; Dry Cold: +19 °F to -4 °F; Intense Cold: -5 °F to -25 °F; Extreme Cold: Below -25 °F. For the purposes of this article, cold weather and extreme cold weather encompass them all.
2. See the after-action reports for Mountain Exercise 1-16, 2-16, 1-17, 2-17, and Exercise COLD RESPONSE 16.
3. Maj Mark Wlaschin, et al., "Every Clime and Place," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (April 2017), available at <https://www.mca-marines.org> and Capt Alexandra Anderson, "The ACE and the Arctic," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (May 2017), available at <https://www.mca-marines.org>.
4. Information is available at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1st_Marine_Division_\(United_States\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1st_Marine_Division_(United_States)).
5. All Force Service Support Groups were reorganized as MLGs in 2005.
6. The four parts of a MAGTF are the command element, GCE, ACE, and LCE.
7. Capt Justin A. Hooker, "Logistics in Distributed Operations," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (March 2011), available at <https://www.mca-marines.org>.

