Professionalize the Comm Officer Career Road Map

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The time has come to professionalize the communications officer (CommO, MOS 0602) community via the creation of a formal career track, thereby eliminating the current, random, "bloom where planted" nature of the CommO's career road map.

The Challenge

Currently, the CommO is only required to attend one formal course, the Basic Communication Officer Course (BCOC), to obtain a career worth of knowledge in an occupational field where technology doubles every two years.[1] In other words, when the CommO is promoted to major and assigned as a regimental or MEU S-6 (approximately ten years), the technology he learned is five generations removed from the program of instruction taught. When selected for commander, as a lieutenant colonel of a communication battalion/squadron, the technology that he is tasked with supervising has again leapt two more generations. Finally, when promoted to Colonel (approximately 25 years after BCOC) and assigned as a MEF Assistant Chief of Staff G-6 advising a Commanding General on enabling C2, that same technology has again seen a generation change of at least ten times since the CommO received required formalized education. The lack of required training creates a situation wherein the CommO is now advising or supervising the planning, installing, operating, and maintenance of communications equipment that has gone through multiple generational evolutions and employs equipment he may never have seen. Additionally, the CommO's primary task of advising his regimental or MEU commanding officer or MEF commanding general on how to enable C2 is reliant on subordinate staff work rather than personal experience or training. This simply does not make sense if we, as a Corps of Marines, really expect to able to "Preserve the ability to command and control in a contested information network environment."[2]

Who Is today's CommO?

A Marine Corps CommO is the most versatile officer in the MAGTF. CommOs are critical enablers in every element of the MAGTF and are located in every type of unit—ensuring MAGTF commanders the ability to C2 assigned forces. If you have a technical problem, a CommO can solve it. If you have a problem that requires a Marine who understands how the MAGTF or joint force operates, a CommO can handle it. If you need someone who can command formations, the CommO leads too. If you need an effective staff member, CommOs advise. By virtue of this enabling capability, CommOs are able to provide support to MAGTF commanders their understanding of the seven warfighting functions and how the necessary synergy of each creates dilemmas for our adversaries, which is unmatched by their peers in the information environment.[3]

The Bottom Line

CommOs are leaders and electronic fire support coordinators[4] who can do it all, and they are in high demand across the Marine Corps and joint force. With that said, CommOs tend to deviate from the traditional path because there just are not sufficient numbers of traditional Marine Corps billets to feed the third largest MOS in the Marine Corps. This lack of a clearly defined road map has

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created critical experience gaps throughout the Fleet Marine Force and Supporting Establishment with a corresponding detrimental effect on traditional billet experience. In order to correct this deficiency, the Deputy Commandants for Information (DC I) and Combat Development and Integration) need to develop and implement an 0602 road map. Concurrently, an information C4 workforce table of organization review needs to be conducted to ensure that all captain and above communication command (Comm Bn/Sqdn) and operations (CommBn/squadron operations

officer, MEU/regimentalt S-6, and assistant chief of staff G-6) billets are changed from MOS 0602 to MOS 0603 MAGTF Communication Planner. This action will require all CommOs, who desire senior supervisory and advisory roles, to attend the MAGTF Communication Planners Course (MCPC). Unlike BCOC, where foundations are taught, MCPC provides CommOs the education in the technological gaps that were formed since BCOC. Furthermore, MCPC serves to further professionalize the force by enhancing the CommOs' ability to function as an electronic fire support coordinators[5] capable of leading "cyber bases of fires"[6] in support of MAGTF and joint operations.

The key to the successful implementation of this plan is a "top-down approach" to talent management and retention, which requires a concerted effort by DC I as well as the current 0602 leadership. In accordance with the 38th Commandant's CPG, if we are truly going to reward performance in equal measure, then promotion/command selection boards should recognize non-traditional billets, (i.e., cyber support or naval integration experience) as exceptional skills. This change requires DC I as the occupational field sponsor to socialize how those billets directly impact operations and, thus, translate to future board members.

Senior leaders must take an active role in guiding their CommOs to ensure that they are not only tactically and technically proficient but pursue a diverse career path to include:
- Service in differing geographical areas and elements of the MAGTF, thereby increasing their value to the institution in more senior billets.
- One FMF tour per rank—at a minimum. It is recommended to seek out opportunities to gain one deployment in company grade and field grade, serving in at least two MEFs, to include each component of the MEF, a MEU deployment, and one HQMC or Marine force-level tour.
- A captain and major tour in a b-billet or independent duty (I-I duty, TBS, MCRD, recruiting duty, Marine officer instructor) or in Supporting Establishment areas with MOS credibility: Marine Corps Communication Electronics School (BCOC instructor), MAGTF Information Technology Support Center (MITSC), Marine Corps Cyberspace Operations Group (MCCOG)/Marine Corps Forces Cyberspace Command, Deputy Commandant, Information, Information Command, Control, Communications and Computers Division.
- MOS-specific PME. Successful completion of MCPC as a captain and assignment of the 0603 MOS, and completion of all *DODI 8140, Cyber Security* [7] compliant training.
- Completion of grade-level required PME. Both non-resident or resident course carry equal weight for promotion and command, but the CommO should seek to complete resident PME at least once in his career.
- Completion of a joint tour and joint PME as a mid-grade 0603 major, post-FMF tour or after a lieutenant colonel command tour/inter-Service-level school.

The Way Ahead

To paraphrase the Commandant: the CommO must be focused on winning in combat in the most challenging conditions and operating environments.[8] A proven method to prepare that officer for success in that environment is the creation of a CommO road map. All that is required is the leadership at levels *"to make it happen."*[9] (author's emphasis). The Information C4 workforce must recognize that billets of command (supervisory) and operations (advisory) needs additional formalized training and education that can only come with the MOS 0603 and an established road map. In addition to 06XX occupational field sponsor publishing a MOS road map (or career path) and DC I implementing that path, sound 0602/0603 talent management will ensure future commanders have the most qualified supervisors and advisors available.

Notes

1. In accordance with Moore's Law, a computing term which originated around 1970; processor speeds, or overall processing power for computers, will double every two years. Available at http://www.mooreslaw.org.

2. Gen David H. Berger, *Commandant's Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC: July 2019).

3. Phone conversation between Maj Jeffrey H. Robichaux, 06XX Occupational Field Manager, and Maj Robert A. Doss, MMOA 0602 Major Monitor, on 10 July 2019.

4. Maj Paul L. Stokes, "The Electronic Fire Support Coordinator," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: April 2011). This article explains how a Marine communications officer can improve his ability to support combat operations by becoming "an operator/tactician" vice remaining in his comfort zone as "the technical guy."

5. Ibid.

6. Maj Paul L. Stokes and LtCol Barian A. Woodward, "The Cyber Base of Fire", *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: April 2018). This article explains how Marine Corps cyber, communications, electronic warfare and intelligence resources can be integrated into a cyber combined arms team capable of offensive cyber operations, defensive cyber operations, and DOD information network operations, and led by an 0603 MAGTF Communication Planner.

7. *DODI 8140, Cyber Security*, is the DOD directive that unifies the overall cyberspace workforce and establishes specific workforce elements (cyberspace effects, cybersecurity, and cyberspace information technology) to align, manage and standardize cyberspace work roles, baseline qualifications, and training requirements.

8. "The Cyber Base of Fire."

9. Ibid.

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