

The Marine Security Guard Program

A primer

by LtCol Frank A. Chawk, III

Marines and officers alike hear about Marine Security Guards (MSG) and think that the program sounds “cool” while others hear MSG and imagine Marines spending their time at cocktail parties in embassies abroad. Living overseas, working in embassies and consulates, interacting with members of the Department of State, and foreign cultures all sounds rewarding for some and appalling to others. Regardless of the perception, the reality is that the program provides an insightful experience for those fortunate enough to participate in the program. However, there are a litany of misperceptions about what Marines and officers alike do when serving with the Marine Corps Embassy Security Group (MCESG). The purpose of this article is to describe the program and MCESG

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structure to clarify, educate, and advertise the capabilities and limitations of MSGs, as well as to highlight opportunities for officers and enlisted Marines who could serve on the program.

Contrary to popular belief, Marines have not served as MSGs since 1775, but Marines have had a long history supporting the Department of State overseas. The current Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the USMC

and the Department of State was signed in 1948. That agreement formalized the relationship and serves as the basis for USMC-Department of State collaboration. The two organizations work together to determine where Department of State requires MSG detachments and what size those detachments will be.

Marine Corps Embassy Security Group Structure

To describe the structure, we begin with MCESG, formerly known as MSG Battalion, which is in Marshall Hall aboard MCB Quantico between the gym and Little Hall. Commanded by a colonel (8041), MCESG is the higher headquarters for the nine separate MSG regions and has a full staff of administration, intelligence, operations, logistics, communications, chaplain, and career planner. While the staff covers all functions found in typical a regimental- or group-sized command, several sections are not staffed at an equivalent level. MCESG oversees not only the nine regional commands but also the MSG School that trains Marines to become MSGs and the portion of the program that screens and selects Marines for the program. The selection is from those who volunteer and who are found to have the ability to



MSG on the range. (Photo by LCpl Adrianna J. Daly.)

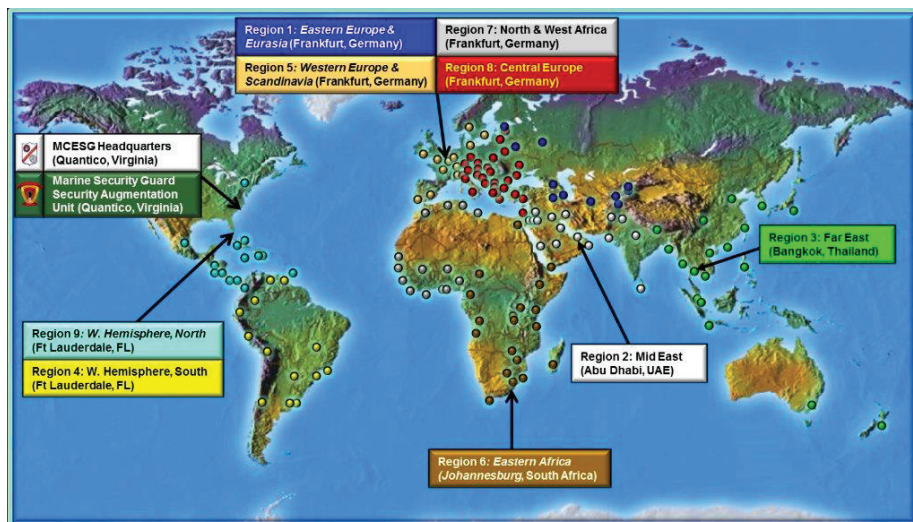


Figure 1. MSGs serve around the world.

obtain a top-secret security clearance, among other attributes, that indicate the Marine will be a great Marine representative to the interagency environment and to the world. MCESG runs five classes per year to produce detachment commanders and MSG watch standers (additional MOS 8156) at the MSG School/MSG Training Center that is located onboard MCB Quantico between Weapons Training Battalion and the FBI Academy. By the beginning of 2016, the MCESG Headquarters will move from main side Quantico and will be collocated with the training facility in a compound and building that replicates a U.S. embassy.

The nine regional commands are the nine lieutenant colonel-slotted (8006) commands that appear on MarAdmins as “REGION 4 FT LAUDERDALE” or “REGION 5 FRANKFURT” and are often confused with Marine Corps Security Force Regiment. (See Figure 1.) Geographically, Regions One, Five, Seven, and Eight are located in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, and work out of the U.S. consulate. Region One’s detachments are mostly in countries that are located throughout the former Soviet Union; Region Five has Western Europe, Scandinavia, and the eastern Mediterranean region. Region Seven has North and Sub-Saharan Africa, and Region Eight covers Central and Eastern Europe. Region Two headquarters is located in U.S. Embassy Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates; it covers

the detachments throughout the greater Middle East and Southwest Asia. Region Three is in U.S. Embassy Bangkok, Thailand; it covers the Asia Pacific region. Regions Four and Nine are collocated at a Department of State facility in Fort Lauderdale, FL, and are the only two U.S.-based regional commands. Region Four has South America, while Region Nine covers the Caribbean as well as North and Central America. Finally, Region Six operates out of U.S. Embassy Johannesburg, South Africa, and has detachments throughout central and southern Africa.

Each regional command has a first sergeant as the senior enlisted Marine, four captains, and a small administrative staff to oversee the support of their MSG detachments. On average, each region has 18 detachments and while the numbers vary, each command has approximately 200 MSGs spread throughout its region.

The location of the detachments depends upon where the Department of State requires MSG support. The majority of the detachments are comprised of one SNCO detachment commander and seven (sergeant and below) MSGs. Often, both officers and enlisted Marines alike assume that the Marine House for the MSG detachment is packed full of several squads of Marines. The reality is that the entire detachment could be as small as eight Leathernecks. In essence, the number of posts that the MSGs stand determine

the size of the detachment; therefore, some detachments are much larger than the typical “one and seven.”

MCESG Functions

Beginning again with MCESG in Quantico, Group sets the policies, directives, and orders that pertain to all nine regions. After years of revision and consolidation, MCESG has worked to eliminate redundant and region-specific orders in the nine regions. MCESG orders serve as the overarching directives in an attempt to create consistency and unity across the regions.

The regional headquarters do have some of their own orders and directives, but the intent is to keep those to a minimum for consistency so that the MSG, who normally serves 12 months in three different regions, will know what is expected at each location without having to adjust every 12 months. The most significant reasons why regional headquarters exist are to inspect the detachments to ensure morale, welfare, training, and readiness; to rectify any administrative issues that affect the Marines; and advocate for the MSGs with the regional security officers (RSO) and other staff members to include U.S. ambassadors at the Embassies and consul generals at consulates. Additionally, officers in the region headquarters serve as the reporting senior and reviewing officer for all MSGs in the detachments; typically, the captain who inspects the detachment serves as the reporting senior for all sergeants and above and the region commander serves as the reviewing officer.

Operationally, the detachments fall under the control of the RSO at their embassy or consulate. The RSO is a U.S. special agent for the Department of State’s Diplomatic Security Service (DS); he is a credentialed Federal law enforcement officer who is a security expert. Stated another way, in the embassy or consulate, the MSG detachments work for the Department of State RSO. That is not to imply that the RSO can or will task the Marines to do things contrary to USMC policy or standards but that while the regions maintain administrative control, the RSO has tactical supervision over

the MSG security mission. Regional headquarters maintain a constant line of communication with RSOs to work through any contentious issues.

While the mission of the MSG detachments has changed over time, the current mission is as follows:

Provide protection to mission personnel and prevent the compromise of national security information and equipment at designated diplomatic and consular facilities.

Be prepared to execute plans for the protection of the mission and its personnel as directed by the chief of mission or principal officer through the regional security officer.

Using the baseline detachment of one SNCO and seven MSGs, there is a Marine at post one in the embassy or consulate 24/7. That Marine typically stands post for eight hours and is usually the MSG that people see and recognize when they enter the facility. From that post, the Marine has total control of who enters the chancery's hardline, that area where only those with the appropriate clearance and access may enter. Additionally from that post, the Marine monitors cameras and alarms that cover the entire compound.

In addition to post one, MSG detachments employ a rover or roving watch that circulates in and around the chancery. Employing a rover, the detachment is able to maintain constant presence in post one while conducting security sweeps and responding to unforeseen circumstances, which provides flexibility and mobility to the internal security of the compound. The entire detachment is always on-call to respond to the chancery when there is an emergency.

Collateral duties

Detachment commanders and MSG watch standers are all trained by MCESG in Quantico, VA. While detachment commanders receive special duty assignment (SDA) credit for their billets, MSG watch standers do not. (For more on SDA, see *Marine Corps Order P1326.6D*). Detachment commanders serve in two posts throughout their 36-month tours. Typically, one is in an austere environment and one is

in a more developed location, although there are no guarantees. Just because a detachment commander has his initial assignment in Monrovia, Liberia, does not mean that he will have a follow-on assignment in Rome. With their overseas experience and interaction with the diplomatic community, detachment commanders are prime candidates to partake in the Foreign Area SNCO (FAS) Program. Depending on their exposure to the foreign culture, SNCO detachment commanders could apply

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for the FAS FMOS based on experience. Not all assignments are overseas: some detachment commanders serve only one overseas post before returning to the school house to serve as instructors for the second half of their three-year tour or lead an augmentation unit squad in the second half of their 36-month tour. (More on the augmentation unit below).

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36-month tour. While the move process is constant and somewhat difficult to manage, the constant rotation means that detachments are in a perpetual state of training and retraining to build cohesion and detachment proficiency. While many have argued for fewer moves to improve cohesion and reduce turnover, the policy of three 12-month tours is based on lessons learned from Sgt Clayton Lonetree and the worst case of espionage associated with the MSG program. (For more on Lonetree, read *Dancing with the Devil* [Rodney Barker, Dove Entertainment audio, 1996] or *Moscow Station* [Ronald Kessler, Picket Publishers, 1990]).

Reinforcing Capability

In addition to the regions and the detachments, MCESG also has the MSG Security Augmentation Unit (MSAU, pronounced "em-SOW") collocated with Group in Quantico. Led by a handpicked 0302 major, MSAU is made up of a small headquarters element and 10 squads that exist to reinforce diplomatic facilities on short notice. MSAU squads are led by second-post detachment commanders and school-trained MSGs. Typically, MSAU Marines are second- or third-post MSGs. When forward deployed, the mission of the MSAU squads or detachments is to increase security and manpower for the



MSG graduation. (Photo by LCpl Jacqueline A. Garcia.)

RSO during pre- and post-crisis periods. The MSAU detachment will normally accomplish this by conducting random antiterrorism measures and establishing additional security posts. For example, if there is a resident MSG detachment, its main focus would be internal security of the chancery while the MSAU detachment would orient to the outside of the chancery within the compound walls. Outside the compound, perimeter walls are typically guarded by the embassy's locally employed guard force and by host nation security.

So What?

Given the structure and function of the MSG program as articulated above, what does that mean to officers serving with the program? The regional commander is responsible for the administration and good order and discipline of the Marines in the detachments. With his first sergeant as the command's senior enlisted Marine, the command team travels to each of the detachments on a regular basis to get to know the MSGs, provide career counseling and guidance, assess teamwork and cohesion, and at times, administer discipline. The commander and first sergeant conduct command visits (CVs), which generally last two to four days. During those visits, they meet with each MSG; discuss challenges and

initiatives with the detachment commander; and meet with the ambassador, RSO, and other Department of State leadership at the embassy. CVs always include physical training, inspection of the MSG residence, detachment meals, professional military education by the first sergeant and/or commander, and meeting with the detachment commander's family. Conducting CVs is a great opportunity to award and promote MSGs if the timing works out,

of regional executive officer (XO), operations officer (OpsO), and logistics officer (LogO) or future operations officer (FOpsO). Captains serve on three-year tours and generally progress from LogO the first year to OpsO the second, and regional XO on their third year. Regardless of the billet on paper, all four are inspecting officers (IOs), first and foremost, who conduct detailed and intense semi annual inspections (SAIs) of the detachments.

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but regions do not delay such items for the next CV. The lieutenant colonel commanding officer is able to travel extensively throughout the region for CVs and on leave when time permits. This provides a tremendous opportunity to learn about the region, its history, culture, and perhaps some of its languages.

The captains who serve on the regional headquarters staff fill the billets

Per MCESG orders, every detachment undergoes an SAI every six months. In an ideal world, CVs would also occur every six months, offset from the SAIs, so that the detachments see someone from region every quarter. SAIs share some similarities with the CVs, but the SAIs always involve react drills, a physical fitness test or combat fitness test, and a variety of detailed inspections of the collateral duties that MSGs hold in addition to their roles as watch standers. Collateral duties include things such as morale, welfare, recreation, USMC ball, mess, etc.

Return on Investment

Because the captains travel as much as the commanding officer and first sergeant, those company grade officers are also given an incredible opportunity to travel and learn about the region in which they work. Depending on undergraduate and graduate level education and language skills, regional COs and IOs are prime candidates to apply for FAO/RAO experience track if they do not already possess the FAO (824X) or the RAO (822X) MOS. When screening for command or discussing orders with their monitor, those officers could benefit by having the FAO or RAO FMOS. Having that additional designator could



MSG Marines have to maintain weapons proficiency. (Photo by LCpl Adrianna J. Daly.)

help slate the officer to the command or billet where his regional expertise, language skills, and education would be most applicable. Following successful command or a good tour as an IO, regional commanding officers and captains have tremendous regional travel experience to support applying for the MOS.

Likewise, the SNCOs serving as detachment commanders are prime candidates to apply for the FAS experience track. Each SNCO will serve two 18-month tours, typically in two different regions of the world. While at post, the SNCO is afforded the opportunity to attend local language classes provided at the embassy. Depending on interests and strengths, the SNCO could focus on one of the regions, and depending on language capability, could apply for the FAS FMOS.

For more details on how to apply for the FAO/RAO or FAS MOSs, contact PLU-8 (International Affairs Branch) within Plans, Policies, and Operations, HQMC. The international affairs program is currently managed by LtCol Jude Shell, Mr. Clay Fisher, and Ms. Brittany Patterson. For information on the Marine Attaché program, contact HQMC Intelligence Department at (703) 614-4022, (571) 256-9326, or review the website at <http://www.hqmc.marines.mil/intelligence/Inte-LOSPERS/DefenseAttacheProgram.aspx>.

There are also opportunities for NCOs leaving the program to capitalize on their experiences and also contribute to the greater good of the Marine Corps. LtCol Frank Baker, USMC(Ret), now the Executive Director, MCEG, relays the story of how a former MSG played a significant role in prepping for Operation Eastern Exit (noncombatant evacuation operation of U.S. Embassy Mogadishu, Somalia) in January 1991. As the S-2 (intelligence) for Battalion Landing Team 1st Bn/2d Marines, Baker's intelligence preparation of the battlefield products were based on outdated information obtained from the joint intelligence center aboard USS *Guam* (LPH 9). Had it not been for a Marine chief warrant officer onboard the ship who had been an MSG in Mogadishu and



It's more than standing duty at post one. (Photo by LCpl Terry W. Miller.)

who knew firsthand the updated locations of key buildings, compounds, and terrain features, the battalion Marines would not have been properly prepared for their mission. This former NCO on MSG duty made the difference.

Like all units in the Marine Corps, NCOs on MSG duty are the heavy lift-

a collocated Marine intelligence unit or the MCEG counterintelligence staff officer.

An assignment with MCEG can be a very rewarding experience which could also lead to additional opportunities overseas. Marines who are able to participate in the program should

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ers in accomplishing the mission. MSG duty broadens the horizon for many of these Marines. Some depart the Marine Corps and seek jobs with Federal agencies, some return to their MOS with an array of experiences, and some seek lateral moves to a different MOS. The 0211 counterintelligence/human intelligence MOS has benefited greatly from MSG lateral moves. Throughout the ranks of the 0211 (and 0210 chief warrant officer) MOS, you will find numerous former MSGs. The exposure to the Department of State, the intelligence community, other government agencies, and living among and dealing with foreign cultures prime MSGs for a career in Marine Corps intelligence. For more information concerning lateral moves to the 0211 MOS, Marines should contact

capitalize on the chance to learn as much as they can about the culture, the region, and the languages within their area of operations. The fast-paced work environment is demanding but can be managed with good organization, discipline, and efficiency. Exposure to the multifaceted and complex duty with MCEG provides a glimpse into the challenges of interagency coordination for a command with a global focus. Billets are limited. Do not pass up the opportunity.

