

Marine Corps Enlisted to Officer Programs

An unnecessary secondary rite of passage

by Capt Thomas E. Haluska

Every year hundreds of enlisted Marines apply for the highly competitive Marine Corps Enlisted Commissioning Education Program (MECEP) and the Enlisted Commissioning Program (ECP) in order to become officers. Having completed a minimum of three years of time in service and attained the minimum rank of sergeant, each enlisted Marine—once he is selected—must attend ten weeks of Officer Candidate School.¹ It is here at OCS where enlisted Marines are nominally reduced to “candidates” and then must endure their second rite of passage into the Marine Corps, the first rite of passage being thirteen weeks of Recruit Training. Marine Corps Order 1040.43B along with numerous MECEP/ECP Marine Corps Administrative Messages (MARADMIN) fail to cite an exact purpose as to why enlisted Marines must accomplish a secondary rite of passage in order to become a Marine officer. In addition to the lack of an official purpose behind sending enlisted Marines to OCS, there are issues pertaining to cost, OCS attrition rates, and peer comparison that make an argument against the necessity of sending enlisted Marines through a secondary rite of passage. The requirement for sending enlisted Marines to OCS, as set forth in MCO 1040.43B, should be removed and replaced with a cost-efficient alternative.

Purpose

The Marine Corps has two major training pipelines that have been es-

>Capt Haluska is currently serving as Director of the Tactical Intelligence Officers Course; he served as both a Field Artillery Cannoneer and as an Imagery Analyst throughout his tenure as an enlisted Marine.

tablished in order to turn civilians into Marines. Enlisted Marines attend thirteen weeks of Recruit Training—also known as Boot Camp—and officers (minus Naval Academy and United States Military Academy graduates) attend either a ten-week Officer Candidate Course (OCC), two iterations of

a six-week Platoon Leaders Course, or the abridged six-week NROTC commissioning course at OCS.²

The MECEP and the ECP were established in order to provide enlisted Marines with the opportunity to become Marine Officers.³ The first hurdle in becoming a Marine Officer for enlisted Marines is the submission and approval of a MECEP or ECP “package” and then attending ten weeks of OCC.⁴

OCC and Recruit Training are initial rites of passage that individuals must overcome in order to become Marines, and one could argue that one rite of passage would be sufficient in order to maintain the title of “Marine.” This is



The Crucible is the Corps’ rite of passage—a grueling test of physical and mental endurance that values teamwork. (Photo by Sgt Melissa Marnell.)

not the case, however, for enlisted Marines who wish to make the transition to become a Marine officer. Enlisted Marines who attend OCC are stripped of their rank and “considered candidates while attending OCS”; however, they are still “entitled to pay and allowances” of their current pay grade.⁵ One could argue that enlisted Marines have already earned the title of Marine and that the idea of being processed through yet another iteration of basic training seems completely unnecessary.

The Fiscal Year 2019 (FY19) MECEP, ECP Board One results consisted of 39 MECEP selectees who had an average of 7.48 years in service and had an average rank of staff sergeant.⁶ Many of the senior NCO’s and SNCO’s had previous leadership billets, which included Fiscal Chief, Officer Selection Assistant, Battalion Logistics Chief, and Intelligence Chief, just to name a few.⁷ In some cases, enlisted Marines have already served in combat related leadership roles. While the author attended OCS in 2012, he had multiple enlisted peers (fellow candidates) with robust leadership backgrounds, which included one who had just served as an infantry platoon sergeant and another who was a Silver Star recipient for actions during combat operations in Fallujah, Iraq, in 2005. The question here is simple: Why are enlisted Marines with robust real-world experiences in leadership, combat, and fleet operations required to attend a second rite of passage? The current process of turning enlisted Marines into officers has proven to be a time consuming, cumbersome process that forces experienced Marines to attend an additional ten weeks of unnecessary basic training.

Enlisted Marines attend OCC with many non-enlisted “traditional” OCC candidates (“traditional” candidates accounted for 75 percent of all OCC candidates in FY19)⁸ who are coming directly from the civilian world (i.e. college or the professional workforce). Although enlisted Marines and “traditional” candidates attend OCC alongside each other, there is a stark contrast in their paths to becoming an officer. The main difference is the fact that enlisted Marines have already



Officer Candidate School is a continuous evaluation of the individual’s leadership potential in an environment of physical and mental stress. (Photo by LCpl Brian Domzalski.)

served within the Fleet Marine Force in a multitude of different work roles and responsibilities. The “traditional” non-enlisted OCC candidate has yet to have been tested through the rigors of basic training, MOS schools, field training, leading Marines, or let alone participating in combat operations. It is without a doubt that “traditional” non-enlisted candidates bring an immense amount of diversity and much needed fresh thought to the Marine of-

clear as to why enlisted Marines must attend a second rite of passage in order to become an officer.

In addition to the stark contrast between enlisted Marines and that of their non-enlisted peers at OCS is that of the difference in requirements for NROTC Midshipmen to become Marine officers. According to MCRCO 1100.2A, NROTC Midshipmen only have to complete an abridged “six-week commissioning course at OCS between

The current process of turning enlisted Marines into officers has proven to be a time consuming, cumbersome process that forces experienced Marines to attend an additional ten weeks of unnecessary basic training.

icer ranks; however, the non-enlisted “traditional” OCC candidates quest to become an officer pales in comparison to that of his enlisted peer candidates who have proven themselves over the course of their careers. It is evident that non-enlisted “traditional” candidates must pass through their initial rite of passage in pursuit of becoming a Marine officer; however, it is not quite as

their junior and senior year” of college.⁹ NROTC Midshipmen typically conduct drill for about one hour a week, attend Naval Science Courses at their University, and participate in various training requirements for a few years prior to attending OCS. Their collective experience, however, cannot be compared to that of the enlisted Marine who has lived as a Marine every day of his

life in the many years prior to attending OCS. The simple fact that NROTC Midshipmen are required to complete only an abridged version of OCS (six weeks) stemming from their minimal military experience when compared to the ten-week OCC that an enlisted Marine must complete strengthens the case for completely removing the OCS requirement for enlisted Marines. The current policy found in MCRCO 1100.2A and MCO 1040.43B does not take an equally balanced approach with regard to transitioning enlisted Marines and NROTC Midshipmen to becoming officers.

Low Enlisted Attrition Rate at OCS

Enlisted Marines perform exceptionally well at OCS when compared to that of their non-enlisted “traditional” peers as well as NROTC Midshipmen attending the abridged six-week course. From 2009 to 2019, the training attrition rates for ECP Marines was 7.58 percent, while the training attrition rates for MECEP Marines was 7.92 percent.¹⁰ During the same time period, the training attrition rate for non-enlisted “traditional” OCC candidates was 28.82 percent, and the attrition rate for NROTC Midshipmen was 10.39 percent.¹¹ More importantly, MECEP and ECP Marines outperform their non-enlisted and Midshipmen peers in the category of Unsatisfactory Evaluation (UE) attrition rates as well. From 2009 to 2019, the UE attrition rate for ECP Marines was 3.79 percent, whereas the attrition rate for MECEP Marines was 2.96 percent; OCC “traditional” candidates UE attrition rate was 14.62 percent, whereas the NROTC Midshipmen UE attrition rate was 7.48.¹² One could argue that the reason why enlisted Marines consistently outperform their non-enlisted peers at OCS is the simple fact that they have already been processed through their initial rite of passage (Recruit Training) and the fact that they have years of FMF experience prior to attending OCS. The quantitative analysis mentioned above highlights the fact that enlisted Marines have performed exceptionally well at OCS over the last decade and helps to enhance the argu-

ment of removing the OCC requirement altogether.

Personnel Cost

248 enlisted Marines were selected for the MECEP/ECP in FY19, the average OCC platoon has a total of 55 candidates; therefore, the 248 enlisted Marines selected for MECEP/ECP in FY19 accounted for approximately 4.5 platoons worth of candidates for that year. The standard OCC platoon is typically staffed with one captain and four Staff NCOs (usually between the rank of staff sergeant to gunnery sergeant) in order to fulfill key billets such as platoon commander, platoon sergeant, and sergeant instructor. On average, a total of four captains and twelve SNCOs are required to fulfill platoon commander, platoon sergeant, and sergeant instructor billets in order to process 248 enlisted Marines through OCC. The aforementioned officers and SNCO’s could have staffed a total of four Marine company’s in the FMF rather than fulfill billets at OCS. Eliminating the need for enlisted Marines to attend OCS would reduce the overall number of platoons annually at OCC from 26 to 21.5, which equates to an approximate reduction of 18 percent in personnel needed in order to support said Marines.

The reduction of eighteen percent of personnel required to support the three OCCs each year would also have a direct affect in reducing the cost associated with officers and SNCOs who execute Temporary Assigned Duty orders in order to fulfill billets for the much more robust summer OCC. The summer OCC consists of a total of twelve platoons, which is five more than the standard seven platoons found in the Spring and Fall OCCs. In FY19 alone, a total of \$455,000 was spent in order to provide per diem and lodging costs associated with staffing the Summer OCC. That same summer OCC also had the largest number of enlisted Marines with a total of 102 attending, which was much larger when compared to the Fall and Winter totals of 61 and 85, respectively. In addition to personnel and Temporary Assigned Duty costs associated with processing 248 enlisted

Marines at OCS are the administrative, logistical, and medical processes that go along with sustaining the daily training routines of said enlisted Marines. It goes without saying that a reduction of 248 candidates (25 percent of all OCC candidates)¹³ per year would most likely correlate to a reduction in administrative, logistical, and medical costs as well.

Solution: Enlisted to Officer Transition Course

It is evident that even if enlisted Marines are permitted to bypass a second rite of passage, they still must be further evaluated and screened during their transition process to becoming an officer. One possible solution for enlisted Marines would be the establishment of a Marine Corps Enlisted to Officer Transition Course. The Officer Transition Course would be formalized training for enlisted Marines that would focus on platoon and company level leadership billets. Enlisted Marines would have to complete leadership evaluation exercises focusing mainly on platoon commander billets and would be strictly evaluated and screened accordingly. Additionally, if Marines fail to fulfill requirements within the Transition Course, they would be dropped from their respective program prior to commissioning. The Transition Course would be a new prerequisite for commissioning.

The Transition Course would be a low-cost solution in place of sending Marines to OCS. MECEP Marines would be evaluated and screened by their Marine Officer Instructor and Assistant Marine Officer Instructors during their first year of attendance at their respective university. The MOI would have the final authority on whether a Marine would need additional training, remediation, or be dropped from the program altogether. ECP Marines would attend their Transition Course at The Basic School and would not commission until they have completed the course.

Conclusion

OCS is an absolute necessity in order to determine whether or not individuals are capable of leading Marines in the FMF. However, after comparing

and contrasting the difference between individuals who are initially entering the Marine Corps and those who have already experienced years of service, it is clear that OCS should be reserved for the former rather than the latter. The bottom line is that many if not all MECEP and ECP Marines have already proven their worth as a leader of Marines based on merit and years of experience in a multitude of various billets and occupations throughout the FMF and the need to process them through a secondary rite of passage is completely unnecessary. There is a clear and cost-efficient alternative that could be established in order to screen and evaluate enlisted Marines that have been selected for commissioning, which eliminates the need to send them to OCS. Therefore, the requirement of sending enlisted Marines to OCS should be removed from MCO 1040.43B and MCRCO 1100.2A and replaced with a more cost-effective alternative.

Notes

1. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Order 1040.43B Enlisted to Officer Programs*, (Washington, DC: 2015).
2. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Recruiting Command Order 1100.2A Marine Corps Recruiting Command Officer Commissioning Manual*, (Washington, DC: 2016).
3. *Marine Corps Order 1040.43B Enlisted to Officer Programs*.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MARADMINs 372/18, Fiscal Year 2019 MECEP, ECP, RECP and MCP-R Board One Results*, (Washington, DC: 2019).

7. Staff, "Command Profile," Marine Corps Manpower and Reserve Affairs, (December 2019), available at <https://www2.manpower.usmc.mil/npc>.
8. United States Marine Corps, *Enclosure 1 OCS Retention Report Week 6 WSR, 5-YR, 10-YR*, (Quantico VA: Officer Candidates School, 2019).
9. Marine Corps Recruiting Command, *Marine Corps Recruiting Command Order 1100.2A Marine Corps Recruiting Command Officer Commissioning Manual*, (Quantico, VA: 2016).
10. Marine Corps, *Enclosure 1 OCS Retention Report Week 6 WSR, 5-YR, 10-YR*, (Quantico VA: Officer Candidates School, 2019).
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.





Continuing Education Program

COLLEGE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION AND TRAINING

www.usmcmcu.edu/CDet/continuing-education/





Online Courses

If you are interested in participating in a Scholarly Elective, go to MarineNet and search for the course via the CEP Course Menu in Moodle.



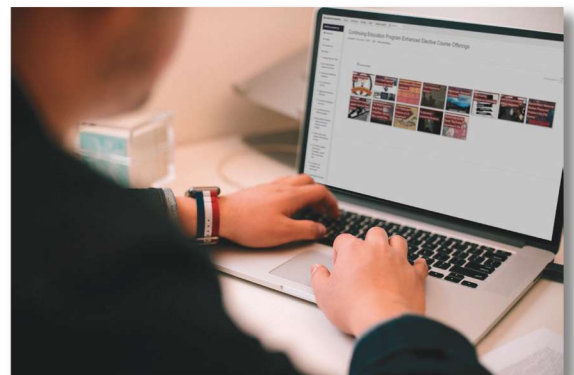
Expert Teachers

College level PME courses developed and facilitated by certified subject-matter experts in support of 16-20 students.



Eligibility

Continuing Education Scholarly Electives are available on a volunteer basis to **all Marines**, active and reserve.



CEP electives are asynchronous instructor led courses hosted on MarineNet Moodle.

mcu_cdets_continuingeducation@usmcmcu.edu

SCHOLARLY ELECTIVES · AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTIONS · BATTLEFIELD STAFF RIDES AND TOURS