

# 21st-Century CLIC

As the threats facing the U.S. military evolve,  
so must the company-level intelligence cell

by 1stLt Evan J. Allard

I leaned against a box of MREs, just glad for a brief respite. The handset crackled in my ear, another radio check from Reaper 1—one of my scout sniper teams. It was the third day of the Marine Corps’ first large-scale force-on-force exercise, and I was the battalion intelligence officer and scout sniper platoon commander for 1st Bn, 3d Marines. The Lava Dogs, reinforced with tanks and AAVs, were doing battle against a fully fortified MAGTF. There was an incredibly rapid flow of information; reports from scout snipers, unmanned aircraft systems assets, and the individual companies were non-stop. It was roughly 0300 in the morning when I closed my eyes and roughly 0400 when I opened them to hear one of my analysts telling me, “Sir, Bravo Company has been destroyed.”

“Intelligence drives operations,”<sup>1</sup> the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen Alfred M. Gray, used this oft-repeated quote to illustrate the essential and inseparable relationship between the two warfighting functions. The vignette above was the result of interruptions in the intelligence cycle and a lack of cohesion between intelligence and operations. According to an article published by LtCol Jeffrey Dinsmore in the *Marine Corps Gazette*, “While the [company-level intelligence cell (CLIC’s)] development was driven by a [counterinsurgency] mission, the future of the Marine Corps operations demands the capability remains intact.”<sup>2</sup>

On the surface, the practice of embedding intelligence Marines into infantry companies seems to make tactical sense. Having a Marine who knows the intelligence cycle and is able to apply it to infantry operations can greatly increase the effectiveness of the

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company. However, the reality is that most CLIC Marines are underutilized. Many are even “tasked away” to mundane requirements, such as driving or radio watch, or given additional duties such as headquarters platoon sergeant (which, albeit, important but is still a misuse of personnel).

This leads to a three-fold problem. On one side, junior Marines who are thrust into a billet with immense responsibility are seldom prepared to excel. The training is not designed to produce 02XX or 03XX Marines who are capable of fulfilling the intelligence requirements of an infantry company. This often results in a

lack of confidence from the company staff in their assigned CLIC Marine. A junior Marine armed with only two weeks of CLIC training is not ready to brief or advise company commanders and their staff. Company commanders want to receive a finished product that requires little supervision of the intelligence Marine as he conducts intelligence support to operations. When they realize the discrepancy between their expectations and the reality, it can change the view of that Marine from “force multiplier” to “burden.”

On the other side is the outdated way the Marine Corps “paints” adversary threat pictures during Service-level exercises. Intelligence as a whole is often overlooked during training exercises when the enemy is “notional.” For example, the long-running intelligence scenario for the Weapons and Tactics Instructor Course (known as



**TALONEX is a predeployment exercise that gives the GCE an opportunity to work directly with the ACE. (Photo by Cpl Thomas Miller.)**

TALONEX for the infantry battalions which support it) features enemies who only vaguely correspond to real-world threats and who are given ridiculous names that do little to focus the efforts of the infantry units conducting planning. It is already a challenge to mission commanders and operational planners to convey the seriousness of training exercises to young Marines when combating a notional enemy; the difficulty of that task is exacerbated when the adversary is given a strange or funny-sounding name. Infantry Training Exercise has long featured an adversary force based on pacing threats. While this enemy utilizes consistent weaponry and assets, almost none of the tactics resemble anything an actual adversary would employ. Compounding this issue is the fact that during live fire training, CLIC Marines simply do not have a role. Enemy reactions to friendly maneuvers are entirely based off of paints from safety personnel. Overall, with a poor intelligence picture and no role during live fire training, there is almost no value for these Marines during Service-level exercises.

The last part of the problem is that in the time between training exercises and deployments, the Marines who serve as the CLIC often return to work for their intelligence shop with little training to keep them current with their skills. Oftentimes, between these exercises, CLIC Marines are at best utilized as glorified weather forecasters for their companies. While dealing with environmental factors that affect operations is a critical task for intelligence Marines, it should not be what these Marines are known for.

CLIC Marines, when properly trained, are capable of serving as force multipliers for company commanders. They can serve as enemy subject-matter experts or small unmanned aerial systems operators to conduct reconnaissance, provide indications and warnings of enemy activity, lead debriefs of patrols, act as a conduit between their battalion's intelligence shop and their company to facilitate map requests, answer requests for information, and disseminate intelligence.



***Have our 03XX Marines received the training they need to succeed as a member of the CLIC?***  
*(Photo by Cpl Thomas Miller.)*

### **It All Starts with Training**

Currently, 02XX and 03XX Marines both serve in CLIC Marine billets. There are issues with how each is trained. The CLIC course for 03XX Marines does not provide the tools they need to succeed. It is most often a two-week introduction course on the fundamentals of intelligence preparation of the battlespace (IPB). The 03XX Marines learn about defining the battlespace, effects, and the enemy; however, they do not learn how

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to conduct tactical intelligence on the ground. When sent back to their unit, they arrive with a wealth of knowledge on the IPB process but little in the way of debriefing an infantry patrol or conducting tactical battle tracking at the company level.

Conversely, the 02XX Marines who are nominated as CLIC Marines are thrust into a billet they are ill-prepared for. The CLIC course, as it stands, does not teach these Marines any new information they would not have learned at their entry-level schoolhouse the (MAGTF Intelligence Specialist Entry Course). According to the *MCIP 2-10.11, Company Level Intelligence Cell*:

The RITC (Regional Intelligence Training Center) CLIC curriculum is more basic (1000 level) than those listed in the infantry training and readiness (2000 level). Therefore the unit must be prepared to train itself on 2000-level tasks in the Infantry Training and Readiness Manual.<sup>3</sup>

### **Solutions**

The first and most obvious solution is to update the curriculum of the CLIC course. IPB should be dropped entirely. While it is important for the CLIC Marine to understand IPB and contribute to the process, it is more important to learn how to conduct tactical-level intelligence. The current course is ten days long, and in those ten days, more emphasis should be placed on leading debriefs, battle tracking, enemy threat recognition, and tactical site exploitation operations. The 02XX CLIC Marine will pick up the necessary

skills to conduct IPB in their entry-level schoolhouse. As for 03XX Marines, the intelligence shop should get them up to speed during the training time between exercises and deployments. This will enhance commanders' confidence in their CLIC Marines' ability to serve in their billet and will give those Marines the necessary tools to thrive in their role.

The second solution (and perhaps the less costly to the Marine Corps) is the centralization of the CLIC Marines. Moving them from the company into the intelligence shop will enable the S-2 to allocate training time as part of a joint effort between the intelligence and operations shop. Intelligence shops across the Marine Corps need to take ownership of their CLICs and their training, employment, and utilization. The billet of "CLIC chief" (as outlined in *MCIP 2-10-II*<sup>4</sup>) is responsible for supervising CLIC operations and personnel; however, in reality, the billet is non-existent. As a collateral billet, the assistant intelligence officer in a battalion could serve as a CLIC officer and in charge implement a training schedule for current and future CLIC Marines (regardless of MOS). Additionally, according to *MCIP 2-10-II*, the company commander has a number of responsibilities for CLIC Marines, such as,

Publish a written plan for CLIC development and implementation . . . Intelligence is an inherent responsibility of command, with the commander being the most important part of the success or failure of the CLIC.<sup>5</sup>

By centralizing these Marines, CLICs in the future could be placed in direct support of infantry companies, developing working relationships and receiving the training that would build up trust in their company commander.

Following changes to the training continuum, the foundations of a culture could be laid for future CLIC Marines. Instead of sending junior Marines with very little time in the Fleet, the CLIC should be a position for an experienced NCO. By manning the position with an NCO who is confident and capable, the confidence that commanders have in their CLICs will rise. Additionally, that NCO will be



**An experienced NCO should be the lead in the CLIC, not so a Marine with little time in the Operating Forces.** (Photo by Cpl Thomas Miller.)

able to conduct a turnover with his replacement. As in most billets in the Marine Corps, a good turnover greatly increases the chance of success for the oncoming billet holder. The knowledge and failures of the former CLIC Marine can be shared and learned from. Having a period of transition will address some of the major problems as outlined in this article by increasing the abilities of the CLIC as a whole and instilling a sense of confidence in the abilities of these Marines.

The centralization of the CLIC is critical for the Marine Corps to stay ahead of pacing threats. An appropriately trained and confident NCO has the ability to breathe fresh air into the tired scenarios that often emphasizes higher-level staff planning but paint little realism for the junior Marine in the fighting hole. The 03XX Marines would see the CLIC as an extension of the intelligence shop and, rightfully, a resource to use as the force prepares itself against current pacing threats. Combined anti-armor team leaders could seek them out for knowledge about enemy threat weapons systems. Scout snipers could leverage them for guidance in ground threat recognition and leading reconnaissance debriefs. Infantry platoon and company commanders could submit requests for information about enemy tactics.

By improving the quality and training of these Marines, the relationship between intelligence and operations during exercises and deployments will improve. This is a relationship that is absolutely crucial for the Marine Corps to outpace its adversaries in the future and sustain its ability to fight and win in any situation.

**Notes**

1. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCWP 2-1, Intelligence Operations*, (Washington, DC: 2003).
2. LtCol Jeffrey Dinsmore, "The CLIC in EF 21: Perspective from the GCE," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: August 2015).
3. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCIP 2-10-II, Company Level Intelligence Cell*, (Washington, DC: 2016).
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

