

A Contrasting View

Should the integrated training exercise remain a training exercise or serve as a readiness evaluation?

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In March 2018, the *Marine Corps Gazette* published an article written by the Tactical Training Exercise Control Group (TTECG) titled, “Should the Integrated Training Exercise Remain a Training Exercise or Serve as a Readiness Evaluation?” This article presents a contrasting viewpoint to their argument.

Presently, TTECG does not conduct an evaluation of a unit’s proficiency at Integrated Exercise (ITX). An informal assessment is done with an after-action report at the end of the exercise. Somewhere between Enhanced MOJAVE VIPER and ITX, TTECG (then titled TEECG [Tactical Exercise Evaluation Control Group] which changed names during the CAX period) stopped evaluating units and adopted the teach, coach, mentor philosophy and methodology. In their article they state, “ITX should remain a training exercise, providing commanders an assessment of their unit’s ability to conduct core mission essential tasks, instead of serving as a readiness evaluation.”¹ I argue that it is time to bring back evaluations during ITX.

Merriam-Webster defines the word evaluate: “to determine the significance, worth, or condition of, usually by careful appraisal and study.” That being said, I submit the following point of view. Every piece of equipment from the M-4 carbine to the F-35 fighter jet undergoes an evaluation prior to being purchased and used by the Marine Corps. As a Marine, one is constantly being evaluated. Prior to Boot Camp, a prospective Marine receives a physical and mental evaluation along with the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery as an intelligence evaluation. During Boot Camp, a recruit is constantly evaluated on his mental and



Marines are constantly being evaluated. (Photo by Cpl Timothy Lutz.)

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physical strength, ability to work as a team, ability to conduct close order drill, marksmanship ability, ability to retain military knowledge and skills, and performance in numerous inspections.

While at the Marines MOS school, the individual Marine, regardless if he is an infantryman, mechanic, or pilot, is evaluated every step of the way. The evaluation also applies to the instructors, if a majority of students fail, attention shifts toward their performance. Once a Marine arrives at his unit, there is an immediate evaluation of strengths and weaknesses prior to being assigned to a specific platoon or section. While in a unit, every Marine is evaluated on their proficiency and conduct before being assigned a rating. Once a Marine is promoted to sergeant, a more formal evaluation is done in the form of a fitness report. During my time in the Corps, not one relationship with a reporting senior was “adversarial”

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because I was being evaluated. Since I knew I was going to be evaluated, I worked harder to be a better, more proficient Marine. No matter who was my reporting senior, evaluator, or instructor while in school, the relationship was nothing but professional.

Moreover, in every school a Marine attends (even those not MOS related, such as Sergeant’s Course, SNCO Academy), the Marine is evaluated prior to certification or graduation. Marine Corps Service-levels schools, such as the Tactical MAGTF Integration Course, Intermediate MAGTF Logistics Operations Course, Mountain Exercise, and Weapons and Tactics Instructor, are institutions where that Marine student or pilot will be evaluated. The Navy–Marine Corps Team undergoes an evaluation prior to being certified as MEU capable. U.S. Army units undergo evaluations at the Joint Readiness Train-

ing Center and the National Training Center. The U.S. Air Force participates in the National Exercise Program and the Joint Exercise Program where the objective is:

Air Force units participate in National Exercise Program and Joint Exercise Program exercises to hone and refine their execution of mission essential and supporting tasks, validate training, improve response capabilities, and enhance and evaluate readiness.²

If the present lack of evaluation is looked through with a business lens, I submit this hypothetical example: A fictional business is producing vehicles. This vehicle is made up of numerous parts that come from all over the country. The vehicle is assembled in Texas. Once the vehicle is finished, it goes immediately to market without any type of evaluation. Does this make sense? What do you believe will be the quality

of the product? How would you know where problems lie? I am certain that you would not know where to begin to fix any problems. This anecdote runs parallel to the Marine Corps from “street to fleet.”

ITX is presently one of the capstone training events the Marine Corps runs on a regular basis where five regimental headquarters, ten infantry battalions, ten artillery batteries, five combat logistic battalions, five tank companies, five assault amphibious vehicle companies, five light armored reconnaissance companies, reconnaissance, trucks, radio battalion, law enforcement battalion, combat engineers, and the whole host of units that make up the ACE pass through annually. How does the Marine Corps know if their final product is proficient or deficient? How does the Marine Corps fix any problems or issues with the Marine, unit, training,

or equipment? Currently, there is no documented data telling us where in the pipeline there is a problem. Can TTECG validate a unit’s performance in the absence of evaluation data? Do they get better? Can TTECG and Program Management and Accounting honestly identify a trend in the absence of data? Can Training and Education Command justify the time, personnel, and expense of any of their training in the absence of data validation? Does an Infantry Small Unit Leader Course, Tactical MAGTF Integration Course, Intermediate MAGTF Logistics Operations Course, Mountain Exercise or Weapons and Tactics Instructor graduate increase a unit’s performance? Does a communications Marine know all the communications equipment or frequency requirements of the unit? Without data, we do not know.

According to the CG, TECOM, MajGen William Mullen, “We also do not have adequate means to gather data, analyze it to identify trends, then enable them to be corrected.”³ With this being stated, now is the time to start evaluating units against the training and readiness standards to provide the data and allow the Marine Corps to fix issues in the training pipeline. Ultimately, this will improve training, training standards, the individual Marine, the unit, and the entirety of the Marine Corps. If an evaluation is not done during ITX, the next time a unit has a chance to be evaluated will be by our adversaries in combat. Is this acceptable?

Notes

1. TTECG, “The Marine Corps’ Integrated Training Exercise,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: March 2018).
2. Headquarters U.S. Air Force, *Air Force Instruction 10-204, Participation in Joint and National Exercises*, (Washington, DC: March 2015).
3. CG Training and Education Command, *Commander’s Guidance*, (Quantico, VA: July 2018).

