

Building Partner Capacity and Developing Leaders

Why marksmanship mobile training teams matter

by Capt Corey R. Letts

The Marine Corps Operating Forces should continue to serve as the sourcing solution for regionally aligned Marine Forces marksmanship mobile training teams (MTTs). These short, inexpensive, and scalable security force assistance (SFA) engagements enhance the proficiency of Marine Corps combat marksmanship coaches (CMCs), incentivize individual performance in garrison, serve as a force retention mechanism, and facilitate the development of a professional, mature, and operationally experienced NCO Corps. Sourced from the Operating Forces using the Global Force Management

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system, marksmanship MTTs are but one SFA activity operating within the larger security cooperation framework, designed to “organize, train, equip, rebuild/build, and advise (OTERA) foreign security forces (FSF) as well as their supporting institutions from the tactical to ministerial levels.”¹ SFA engagements are conducted in accordance with the geographic combatant

commander’s theater campaign plan, across the spectrum of conflict, and during all phases of military operations.² They are nested with other regional, service, intergovernmental, and national policy level directives and serve as the DOD’s contribution to the United States’ “whole of government approach” to accomplishing security sector reform initiatives.³ Marksmanship MTTs provide a unique opportunity to directly increase the capacity and capability of FSF while strengthening bilateral and multilateral professional military: military relationships that enable coalition problem solving, foster interoperability, and aid in the mitigation of shared regional security concerns.

While marksmanship MTTs often integrate ancillary training based upon partner nation guidance and overall training objectives, their primary focus remains developing, sustaining, and improving individual FSF marksmanship proficiency. Partner-nation participants’ fire modified Marine Corps Combat Marksmanship Program (MCCMP) courses of fire, are evaluated according to Marine Corps standards, and receive Training and Education Command formal periods of classroom instruction. Using the building block approach to training, the MTT training schedule builds incrementally from the fundamentals of basic known distance rifle or pistol marksmanship to advanced combat shooting and close quarters engagement.⁴ It is mission oriented, standards based, and seamlessly combines



MTTs teach from basic marksmanship to advanced combat shooting. (Photo by Sgt Katelyn Hunter.)

classroom based instruction, practical application exercises, and live fire training.⁵

Institutional Capacity Building

Not surprisingly, the most prominent measure of effectiveness for marksmanship MTTs is the individual professionalism, technical acumen, and quality of instruction provided by MTT CMCs. CMCs are the most visible and interactive element of the MTT and serve as the primary instructors both in the classroom and on the firing line. They demonstrate and ensure adherence to the fundamentals of marksmanship, identify shooting trends, make corrections to improve performance, and ensure all participants adhere to safe weapons handling procedures.⁶

As the MCCMP was designed to build resident marksmanship instructor capacity within units across the MAGTF, MTT CMCs benefit greatly from the experience and challenges associated with teaching marksmanship to a FSF. MTT CMCs must develop and modify their teaching and instructional style to transcend language and cultural barriers while building rapport with a diverse group of foreign participants who often have dramatically different attitudes, experience levels, and familiarity with small arms. The end result is more confident, tactically proficient, and experienced marksmanship instructors who are better able to teach, instruct, and evaluate Operating Force Marines and Sailors during all phases of the MCCMP. Additionally, the marksmanship MTT prerequisite for school-trained CMCs inadvertently acts as a forcing factor for sourcing units to prioritize assignment of MTT personnel to formal, Training and Education Command accredited, certification producing marksmanship courses. These courses include, but are not limited to, CMC, Combat Marksmanship Trainer, and the Foreign Weapons Instructor Course.

While their size and composition can vary, most marksmanship MTTs are limited to eight to ten total personnel. Assignment to these small task organized teams both incentivizes performance and breeds competition in

garrison, particularly among Marines in traditionally “non-deployable” units or commodity sections. The expeditionary nature of the MTT mission, tied with the challenges associated with surmounting cultural and language barriers to effectively train a partner nation military force, place a premium on individual performance, maturity, professionalism, and MOS proficiency. Additionally, being provided an opportunity to deploy abroad—notwithstanding its short duration—acts as a tangible force retention mechanism for many first-term Marines.

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Force Retention

A good portion of Marines and Sailors exiting the Service after their initial enlistment can be traced to low job satisfaction, particularly in garrison, and the inability to deploy.⁷ Fewer than “one in five Marines [today] has a single deployment [combat or otherwise] under their belt, and the number of Marines who have deployed twice is now less than one in ten.”⁸ While the global war on terrorism shows no sign of ending soon, the operational environment has dramatically changed. Conventional force draw downs in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the predictable deployment rotation timelines associated with these campaigns, has significantly reduced deployment opportunities. The majority of deployments today are MOS, rank, or billet restricted individual augments, MEUs, or regionally aligned special purpose/crisis response MAGTFs. If a Marine does not have the requisite rank or billet—or is not in the right battalion, battery, squadron, or component command aligned to support these rotations—their chances of deploying are minimal. Thus, marksmanship MTTs are a tangible tool for provid-

ing inexperienced Marines from units not assigned to these rotations an opportunity to deploy.

Leadership Development

Arguably, the most beneficial element of marksmanship MTTs is NCO and small unit leader development. The majority of personnel that comprise and execute marksmanship MTTs are NCOs. Operating independently abroad, far from a parent command and the cumbersome bureaucracy associated with stateside garrison service, challenges these sometimes inexperienced leaders and often puts them in uncomfortable and stressful situations. They must learn to improvise to a constantly changing operational environment, adapt their teaching and instructional styles to effectively engage their foreign counterparts, and overcome cultural and language barriers to accomplish the mission. Subsequently, this cultural emersion, exposure, and unique set of challenges breeds more mature, self-confident, and operationally experienced small unit leaders. Its provides them a unique opportunity to utilize their regional, cultural, and language familiarization skills while fostering decentralized decision making and a bias for action. These NCOs return to their parent commands more resilient and knowledgeable small unit leaders, better able to lead their subordinates in garrison, combat, and future contingency operations.

Dispelling Myths

The Corps’ operational focus has dramatically changed in recent years, transitioning from conducting prolonged counterinsurgency campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, to executing limited contingency operations against non-state actors in the Levant (Libya, Syria, etc.), and preparing for the potential of conventional (or hybrid) conflict against increasingly militaristic and expansionist near peer adversaries such as China and Russia. Subsequently, the value and importance of small SFA engagements like marksmanship MTTs can be easily overlooked. Critics of Global Force Management sourcing argue marksmanship MTTs are finan-

cially draining, marginally effective, and manpower intensive distractions removed from core military functions that threaten their ability to achieve mission essential task list proficiency.

SFA engagements and train, advise, assist (TAA)/OTERA missions are often viewed as the exclusive responsibility of special operations force elements that specialize in low intensity conflict, irregular warfare, and foreign internal defense. This mindset is incredibly shortsighted and

sends the wrong resource demand signal to the services by excusing them from strategically planning and resourcing for TAA and security cooperation more broadly at a time when the U.S. is increasingly integrating this tool into its global playbook.⁹

It ignores fundamental national security and Service mandated strategy, decades of Marines Corps experience advising and training partner forces aboard, and the personal and professional growth opportunities it provides participating Marines and Sailors. It also implies a fundamentally inaccurate assessment of the cost in money, manpower, and time of such engagements.

The Cost

While funding sources can vary depending on the combatant command, marksmanship MTTs are traditionally funded by the National Defense Authorization Act, Section 333 “Authority to Build Partner Capacity” appropriations.¹⁰ This funding covers all commercial air travel, lodging, meals and incidental per diem, and ancillary exercise funds (ammunition). There is no use of the force provider’s operations and maintenance funds. Additionally, marksmanship MTTs are relatively short SFA engagements, the majority lasting no longer than three weeks, and require only eight to ten Marines and Sailors to successfully execute. The low cost, short duration, and minimal personnel needed present no discernable threat to the force provider’s ability to accomplish its Mission Essential Tasks, demonstrate mission essential task list proficiency, or adversely impact Defense Readiness Reporting System percentages.

Conclusion

Despite the litany of transregional, multi-domain, and multi-functional threats facing the United States in the 21st century, the odds of unilateral U.S. military action in any theater or domain of conflict has increasingly diminished. Security cooperation, more specifically OTERA/SFA activities like marksmanship MTTs, have taken on increased importance as a vital tactical level component of the “strengthening alliances and attracting new partners” pillar identified in the *2018 National Defense Strategy*.¹¹ They are a cost effective tool that enables the

building of defense relationships that promote U.S. security interests, the development of allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multilateral operations, and for facilitating [U.S. forces with] peacetime and contingency access to a host nation.¹²

Marksmanship MTTs tie directly to combatant commander theater campaign plan lines of effort and help achieve crucial intermediate military objectives. They serve a finite method to help contain the malign influence of external state actors by building security relationships with crucial regional partners, increase the capability and capacity of FSF to better counter transnational and transregional threat networks, and enable the rapid response of U.S. and multinational forces by fostering interoperability and the sharing of tactics, techniques, and procedures.¹³ They reinforce the United States, and by extension the Marine Corps, as the partner of choice for security cooperation in expeditionary environments where near-peer adversaries are also exporting security cooperation and increasing their level of diplomatic, military, and economic engagement. While the monetary investment tied to this type of episodic engagement is small, the tactical benefits—to the host nation, participating Marines and Sailors, force provider, Marine Forces, and combatant commander—yields an operational return.

Notes

1. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCO 5710.6C, Marine Corps Security Cooperation*, (Washington, DC: 2014).
2. Department of Defense, *DODI 5000.68, Security Force Assistance*, (Washington, DC: 2010).
3. Ibid.
4. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCO 3574.2L, Marine Corps Combat Marksmanship Program*, (Washington, DC: 2014).
5. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCTP 8-10A, Unit Training Management Guide*, (Washington, DC: 2016).
6. *MCO 3574.2L, Marine Corps Combat Marksmanship Program*.
7. Jeff Schogol, “Where have all the Combat Vets Gone?,” *Marine Corps Times*, (August 2017), available at <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com>.
8. Ibid.
9. Melissa Dalton, “Bad Idea: Making SOF the Sole Train, Advise, Assist Provider”, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, (December 2017), available at <https://www.csis.org>.
10. United States Government, Title 10 U.S.C., Chapter 16, § Sect 333, from *National Defense Authorization Act FY 2019*, Sect 1201, (Washington, DC: 2018).
11. James Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of The United States of America*, (Washington, DC: 2018).
12. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-20, Security Cooperation*, (Washington, DC: 2017).
13. United States Southern Command, *2017–2027 Theater Strategy*, (Doral, FL: 2017).

