

# Grasping for Operational Straws

Building OPLOG expertise in the Corps

by Maj Andrew P. Kettner

Marines are not provided, through either traditional career roadmaps or required Training and Education Command (TECOM) courses, a thorough and applicable understanding of the cognitive level of logistics planning: operational logistics. This lack of experience or formal education negatively affects the FMF's influence and lethality, and reducing its relevance as a flexible and sustainable option for geographic combatant commanders. The Marine Corps must maintain a high level of readiness while simultaneously integrating strategic logistics capabilities through the use of the established joint logistics enterprise. This reality exists in the competition and crisis phases of conflict. The Marine Corps can learn from the Navy, as their fleet sustainment construct within each of the geographic combatant commands maintains a stronger operational logistics understanding than Marine Corps FMFs. The Marine Corps service component commands are directed to provide logistics-specific training prior to major subordinate commands deployments. To support the major subordinate command operational training, Marine Corps Logistics Operations Group provides the FMF Operational Logistics Seminars, which offer a venue for Marine Corps Components to fully engage with deploying MEUs and Marine Logistics Regiments prior to their arrival in the area of operations and provide training on the application of strategic capabilities to Marine Corps tactical operations. In the future, the Marine Corps will direct TECOM to develop a web-based and formal course for individuals assigned to MEFs G-4s and Marine Corps Component Staffs.

**>Maj Kettner is a Logistics Officer currently serving as an Instructor with Marine Corps Logistics Operations Group. He deployed in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM with Marine Wing Support Squadron 272 in 2011 and with Combat Logistics Battalion 11, attached to 11th MEU, in 2019.**

Marines assigned to Marine Forces Components will also attend Navy courses, which focus on maritime operational warfare concepts. These efforts will ensure FMFs are logistically set and competitive against our near-peer adversaries and as the choice force for the geographic combatant commander.

*MCWP 7-10, Marine Corps Competency*, defines what organization is required to maintain operational logistics enablers for the FMF and provide opportunities for successful implementation of the Marine Corps' priorities. It makes clear the effectiveness of joint doctrine and the means by which a geographic combatant commander benefits from service component commands: "Services are organized, trained, equipped, and employed using each Services' doctrine, this arrangement fully exploits the capabilities and experience the individual Services can bring to a joint command."<sup>1</sup> Marine Corps Component Commands provide operational logistics oversight for the FMF operating within their assigned area of operation, potentially using Marine Logistics Commands. Currently, Marine Corps Logistics Operations Group provides operational level logistics training to both the Marine Corps Component Staffs and MEFs to support the Marine Corps Component Commands' training requirements: "The Marine Corps component commander also trains the component staff and assigned or attached

Marine Corps forces."<sup>2</sup> *MCWP 7-10* also describes the basis for what Marine Corps Component headquarters must accomplish; however, *MCWP 7-10* lacks clarity on how the Marine Corps Component must set conditions. Considering operational logistics as the application of national strategic resources against tactical level demands, it becomes apparent how routine and achievable it is to engage strategic organizations. Especially so, when deployed personnel know the names, contact numbers, and titles of organizations from which they are seeking support.

Operational logistics seminars, executed through a series of informal conversations, initiated by MEF and MEU leadership with the Marine Corps Logistics Operations Group, serve as the Marine Corps' current bridging solution. Marine Corps Logistics Operations Group provides an avenue for various FMF logistics staffs to recognize their unique position in the facilitation of deployed command realities with very structured support from geographic combatant commands and national government agencies. However, this system is a stand-in between experience-based understanding and TECOM formal training and should not be an institutional answer for the Marine Corps.

To further increase Operational Logistics understanding, TECOM should develop a new course that provides an in-depth review of operational-level lo-

gistics to include requirements identified in *MCWP 7-10*, which are: “deployment support, sustainment, resource prioritization and allocation, and requirements identification activities required to sustain the force in a campaign or major operation.”<sup>3</sup> Specifically, the course should address contemporary processes to engage joint logistics enterprise enablers required within each geographic combatant command. The *Marine Corps Forces Logistics for Deployed Forces Handbook* should serve as the outline for the course. Additionally, the Deputy Commandant of Installation and Logistics will maintain updates, in coordination with TECOM, for the course to ensure applicability to the FMF. This web-based training should be supplemented by a two-to-three-week formal training requirement for personnel assigned to Marine Corps Component Commands and FMFs. This will increase their understanding of joint logistics enterprise opportunities for support. The resident course, developed by Marine Corps Logistics Operations Group or Marine Corps Combat Service Support School, will culminate with an inter-service planning exercise. Perhaps in concert with the Joint Logistics Course, which focuses on applying joint logistics capabilities to the FMF. The future planning exercise will focus on limited logistics and force Marine Corps Component Command and MEF staffs to prioritize limited capacity across the area of operations. Until TECOM develops these training venues, Marine Corps Logistics Operations Group will continue to provide training through the Advance Expeditionary Logistics Operations Course and operational logistics seminars to ensure commands are educated and prepared to utilize operational-level logistics capabilities.

The CMC made clear in his 2019 guidance the enhanced integration of the Navy and Marine Corps is a priority. One way to meet the CMC’s guidance of integration is through increased coordination between the Navy and Marine Corps in the application of operational logistics. Further integration should occur once a common logistics operational picture is refined and developed between Marine Corps and Navy service compo-

nents. The first step toward this integration is the attendance by select personnel from the Marine Corps component and MEF staffs at the Navy Maritime Staff Operators Course (MSOC). MSOC “provides resident education in the application of the Maritime Operations Center (MOC) concept, organization and processes; maritime operational level of warfare concepts, terminology and processes; and the Navy Planning Process (NPP) to produce graduates capable of immediately supporting the commander’s decision cycle at the operational level of warfare in a dynamic and complex environment.”<sup>4</sup> In the future, MSOC and Advance Expeditionary Logistics Operations Course may use a combined planning exercise in which both Navy and Marine Corps capabilities and requirements are prioritized at the operational level. The training scenarios used by the two courses are already similar and consolidation of the scenarios will take a minimal additional review.

Furthermore, to ensure those with operational logistics experience and formal training are assigned positions of appropriate influence within Headquarters Marine Corps and joint commands, an additional MOS should be created and assigned by Headquarters Marine Corps. The military operational specialty would be assigned to E-6 and above personnel that complete the full TECOM curriculum and are assigned to a Marine Forces Command or MEF G-4 staffs. Capturing the importance of these Marines and assignments to follow on tours, within billets of increased influence, incentivizes these assignments and increases the importance of operational and strategic logistics understanding within the Marine Corps. In October 2020, the U.S. Secretary of Defense highlighted the importance of Pacific theater experience when boards are selecting officers for promotion. As more officers and enlisted Marines are assigned within positions of influence, additional opportunities to train MAGTFs for deployment will become apparent and further refinement will occur.

As the Marine Corps continues its campaign of learning more effective

training, directed toward Marine Corps Components and Operational Logistics, this will ensure the cultural change is maintained and joint logistics enterprise operations are enhanced. Marine Corps Logistics Operations Group will continue to facilitate enterprise-level lessons learned and facilitate continued Marine Corps transformation towards a more effective integrated joint logistics enterprise within the geographic combatant commanders’ areas of operation.

With web-based and formal training curriculums developed by TECOM, supervised by Marine Corps Service Component Commands, personnel assigned to Marine Corps Component and MEF G-4s will increase combat readiness through a more effective joint logistics enterprise. Additionally, Marines attending the Navy’s MSOC will develop a better understanding of Navy logistics capabilities while simultaneously informing sailors of Marine Corps capabilities.

Lastly, closely monitoring assignments within the Marine Corps, through designated MOSs will increase the FMF level understanding of the joint logistics enterprise. Implementation of these initiatives will obviate the perceived need to develop new operational level logistics commands, better utilize the joint logistics enterprise, and ensure the FMF remains the command of choice for geographic combatant commanders.

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#### Notes

1. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCWP 7-10, Marine Corps Competency*, (Washington, DC: 2018).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. U.S. Naval War College, “Maritime Staff Operators Course,” *U.S. Naval War College*, n.d., <https://usnwc.edu/college-of-maritime-operational-warfare/Core-Curriculum/Maritime-Staff-Operators-Course>.

