

Reinforcing the Castle

Generating a more capable, scalable, and resourced force for the MEF

by Capt Cameron M. Allen &
1stLts Timothy A. Denning & Sean M. Guthrie

“The will to win is not nearly so important as the will to prepare to win.” Vince Lombardi did not focus his efforts on winning. Rather, he focused on the actions that had to be taken to do so. As a Marine Corps, and as the Nation’s expeditionary force-in-readiness, we have been given the task to man, train, and equip our forces in preparation for any conflict across the spectrum of military operations. Given current resourcing limitations, the implied task is to do so as efficiently and effectively as possible. Within the MLG (Marine Logistics Group), engineers are currently spread between multifunctional battalions in DS (direct support) of infantry regiments, multifunctional battalions in DS of MEUs, and a functional battalion in GS (general support) of the MEF. This hybrid existence can only be maintained with a larger force of engineers. With recent and pending engineer force reductions in engineer force levels, the sustainment of engineer capabilities can be best accomplished through the consolidation of engineers within the functional ESB (engineer support battalion). This consolidation of engineer and utilities forces under one command will enable the MLG to provide scalable, adaptable, and capable general engineering support, increase the commander’s flexibility to mass engineer forces, and ultimately increases the MLG’s ability to provide the full spectrum of logistics support to the MEF during major combat operations. Dispersion of engineer capability among multiple multifunctional battal-

>Capt Allen is a 1302 Combat Engineer Officer currently serving as an Instructor, Defense Nuclear Weapons School. Previously, he served as the Executive Officer, Engineer Support Company, 7th Engineer Support Battalion, and deployed as the Engineer Officer in Charge for SP-MAGTF-CR-CENTCOM 16.1 LCE.

>>1stLt Denning is a 1302 Combat Engineer Officer currently serving as the Remain Behind Element Officer in Charge, Company A, 7th Engineer Support Battalion. He previously served as the Training Officer, 7th Engineer Support Battalion, and deployed as the Engineer Officer for SP-MAGTF-CR-CENTCOM 16.1 CE.

>>>1stLt Guthrie is a 1302 Combat Engineer Officer currently serving as the S-4A, Combat Logistics Battalion 11, preparing to depart on the 11th MEU. He previously served as the Remain Behind Element Officer in Charge, Company A, 7th Engineer Support Battalion.



ESB Mairnes assembling a medium girder bridge. (Photo by LCpl Tyler Stewart.)

ions in the MLG hinders the ability to effectively train to the complete mission essential task list required of these low density capabilities for major combat operations. While multifunctional battalions in the MLG gain the ability to rapidly deploy pre-sized forces, they lack experience and effective training in certain fields.¹ In an ESB, there are experienced SNCO and officers developing, leading, and evaluating training. They are able to provide subject matter expertise, mentorship, direct feedback, and after-action points specifically related to engineering. In recent history, double-digit CLBs (combat logistics battalions) have often had a first-tour second lieutenant combat engineer officer who has just finished Engineer Officers Course and is now accountable for an engineer equipment set that consists of bulk fuel, heavy equipment, power distribution, and water purification equipment. Effective employment and maintenance of this equipment requires experienced personnel, generally chief warrant officers, who have operated within the field for years. Without having spent time at an ESB and working with these subject matter experts, a junior officer's knowledge is limited to the brief classroom instruction received at the schoolhouse. This issue exists on the enlisted side as well. The single-digit CLBs may have a utilities chief gunnery sergeant straight out of Utilities Chief Course who now holds the 1169 Utilities Chief MOS. The 1169 Utilities Chief MOS pulls from three separate occupational specialties. This means they will have a strong background in one of the three utilities fields and limited understanding of the other two. By consolidating the MLG's engineers, ESBs can train, screen, and develop Marines prior to manning the CLBs. Through increasing the competence of the engineers assigned to the CLBs, the MLG's ability to provide engineer support is drastically increased.

The current method of organization creates a modular, one-size-fits-all unit with fixed and finite engineer capabilities that may be well-suited for rapid deployment but are not ideal in capacity for either major combat operations or crisis response missions. When estab-



Transportation support battalion Marines attaching an I-beam to a CH-53 during helicopter support team training. (Photo by LCpl Tyler Stewart.)

lishing the layout of CLBs, ESBs, or combat logistics regiments, we must remember that the “willingness to focus at the decisive place and time necessitates strict economy and the acceptance of risk elsewhere and at other times.”² As potential adversaries approach competitive parity, we, as a Marine Corps, must

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accept the friction inherent to force generation of MEUs and other crisis response missions as secondary in priority to our ability to mass engineers in major combat operations, and not just modular crisis response units, with organic engineer capability. Double-digit and single-digit CLBs, while sharing the same unit name, are distinctly different in priority, organization, and mission. Single-digit CLBs have the mission of providing direct support to infantry regiments, while double-digit CLBs provide the LCE of an MEU. This shared naming convention belies subtle differences in types of missions potentially

required of engineers. The consolidation of combat engineers under one command, while impeding the development of command relationships, will provide the MEF with a more capable engineer force that can be inserted or scaled to meet the requirement of any mission. As an MLG, our emphasis should not be on facilitating the generation of crisis response and contingency forces but rather on providing forces capable of succeeding in major combat operations. With engineers consolidated under the ESB, this will be accomplished primarily through the assumption of the risk inherent in reduced interaction between CLB and special purpose MAGTF commanders and their subordinates. This may be mitigated through increased interaction at the regimental level with engineer representation in order to “focus at the decisive place,” that is, war with a near-peer threat. During Operation DESERT STORM, “[T]he massed power of the engineer support battalions ... [was] key to success in Desert Shield and Desert Storm.”³ This ability to mass was a direct result not of small, multi-functional battalions in DS but of well trained, manned, and equipped functional battalions, such as 7th ESB and 1st Transportation Support Battalion. The ability to mass was due in large part to established command

and support relationships in addition to well-rehearsed C² (command and control) procedures.

This concept, when put into practice, poses potential challenges that, if not mitigated, may neutralize the advantage gained through consolidation of the engineer capability in the ESB. In combat operations, the CO's ability to command and control his force is directly related to the ability of his staff to produce the common operational picture of the battlespace and the knowledge and interconnectedness of his team.⁴ The multifaceted and complex nature of C² necessitates intimate experience with subordinate unit capability as well as knowledge of the intangible effects of diverse personalities. This can only be built over time operating as a composite unit; this effect is magnified in a diverse multifunctional battalion. Together, this combination of a quality common operational picture and intimate and implicit relationships creates the controls through which the commander effectively commands in an expeditionary and time-sensitive environment. Units inexperienced in operating as a composite unit tend to conduct C² following a unidirectional approach that limits reaction and flow

of information. The standard of C² is described in *MCDP 6* as “reciprocal influence” where “command is the initiation of action and control is feedback.”⁵

The difficulty of achieving this standard of C² in the LCE is amplified due to the diverse nature of logistics. The LCE commander must be allowed time to train his unit under the conditions and to the specific mission he will be assigned. In order to achieve the reciprocal influence model of C², the LCE commander must have ample time and quality training with all attachments.

In the case of CLBs without organic engineer support, there is no substitute for the time needed to achieve reciprocal influence in C², but consolidating engineer capabilities in the ESB need not deny supported commands that opportunity. Control measures can be put in place to afford supported commands and supporting engineer units the opportunity to work together in the planning, execution, and post-exercise phases. In order to allow LCE commanders the opportunity to train with their team, habitual relationships between combat logistics regiment staff and engineer company commanders must be established and maintained through the range of military opera-

tions. For example, a composite engineer company will be permanently placed in direct support of a combat logistics regiment. The engineer company commander will work closely with the regimental staff to provide engineer subject matter expertise in planning, execution, and post-exercise requirements, but retain the training resources and knowledge of the engineer battalion. This concept will allow the LCE commander time to train with his engineers under the most likely support relationship used in the more kinetic phases of major combat operations, while allowing the engineer company access to training resources required for a low-density and diverse community only found in a consolidated engineer unit.

The limited number of engineers within the Marine Corps necessitates maximum efficiency and economy of scale in order to man, train, and equip them effectively. This can best be accomplished through their consolidation in engineer support battalions, where the massed experience, equipment set, and leadership best enables the development of capable engineers. The resulting forces will offer increased flexibility to supported commanders to provide the most capable and effective force possible. When the bell tolls, when the flag flies, we will go to any clime and place, building and breaching—the prepared will prevail.



CLBs often have first tour lieutenants responsible for a wide variety of engineer equipment.
(Photo by Cpl Justin Smith.)

Notes

1. BGen Edward G. Usher, CG, 1st Force Service Support Group from ENDURING FREEDOM Combat Assessment Team, *Initial Observations Report: Force Service Support Group Garrison Organization and Transition to Expeditionary Operations*, (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Combat Development Command, August 2003).
2. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCDP 1, Warfighting*, (Washington, DC: June 1997).
3. *Initial Observations Report*.
4. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCDP 6, Command and Control*, (Washington, DC: 20 June 1997).
5. Ibid.

