

# Targeted MOS-Specific PME

Shifting from the industrial age model

by Maj John Campbell

**M**ajGen Mullen—then the commanding general of Training and Education Command (TECOM)—wrote in 2018 and was then echoed by the Commandant of the Marine Corps in his *Planning Guidance* that he has “noticed over the past several years that there is an increasing dissonance between what we are doing with regard to training and education, and what we need to be doing based on the evolving operating environment.”<sup>1</sup> It is hard to argue with their observations, but in my thirteen years as a Marine, we have never been close to concurrence. Can anyone dispute the efficacy of doing a combined arms breach up a desert corridor while time de-conflicting dive delivered unguided ordnances, when a few weeks later, planes were waiting to take us to Iraq and Afghanistan to fight in something completely antithetical to multimillion dollar training exercise? Can someone extol the virtues of attending a nearly yearlong resident PME course where Marines are taught to be a staff (Expeditionary Warfare School [EWS]) or joint or strategic/operational officers (Command and Staff College [C&S])—neither of which billets usually await them following their credentialed completion? Strides continue to be made with regard to training improvements—largely because of lower-level commanders being responsible for training as well as the feedback provided from force-on-force training—but the following discussion attempts to fix a correctable problem with our current education.

With the *Commandant’s Planning Guidance* and *Force Design 2030* as the beacon, the 2020s provide the near per-

**“Prewar education, reputation, influence, and rank matter little when the enemy is gaining ground and very few know how to turn him back.”**

**—Victor Davis Hanson**

**>Maj Campbell is an Infantry Officer with deployments to Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, ENDURING FREEDOM, and INHERENT RESOLVE.**

fect stage for the Marine Corps to do something that should have been done years back to continue to bridge the education to operating environment dissonance: divest from our Industrial Aged resident PME. Moving it to a virtual or distance learning platform—which Marines did while attending their “resident courses”—will open up the engagement window to shift both redirected funding and timing for better and more advanced resident MOS-specific education.

## What is the Industrial Aged PME Model?

Much has been written recently about our past and current industrial age transforming to the information age era in both our schools and training venues.<sup>2</sup> Our current industrial age education model has less to do with the lecture method, rote memorization, and unobserved fitness reports but more so to do with outcomes. Thus, for the sake of this article, industrial-aged resident PME that should be divested to online is defined as any PME that is ubiquitous

to every Marine—regardless of MOS, as they yield the same result upon graduation. If one looks around the classroom and sees a wide array of MOSs, chances are they are likely being instructed on abstracts that are often irrelevant or marginally beneficial to their current and future billets. Threat developments and technological advancements have rapidly changed the character of warfare. It is nonsensical to think an infantry officer and financial management officer should attend the same schooling and receive the same lessons on leadership in the Profession of Arms or the Marine Corps Planning Process. Military judgement and decision making are unmistakably different across the MOS spectrum and our education continuum should reflect. One can certainly draw similar parallels to enlisted PME. Should mechanics and supply staff sergeants at the Resident Career Course really be concerned with tactical tenets? Do administrative gunnery sergeants at Career Course contribute and shape a unit’s mission essential task list? Do they need to learn the ins and outs of the combat operations center and close air support? When examined honestly, the benefits from these courses are not commensurate with the cost, effort and—most importantly—the valuable time committed to attend in person. While one can make a cogent

case there should be some education uniformity across the MOSs, it should not come at the expense of professionalism in one's MOS—especially those tasked with planning and executing tomorrow's fight. Forget the networking buzzword often preached by resident PME graduates; it is a falsehood belied by the Marine Corps having both unity of effort and unity of command as well as additional courses to both educate and train MAGTF staffs. Conversely, targeted MOS education that improves Marines' performance in their current and future billets (think Infantry Unit Leaders for the Infantry Community, School of Advanced Warfare where although a mixture of MOSs, graduates become planners, 1stSgt's Course, etc.) could *and should* be enhanced after relegating the previously discussed schools to a virtual or distance learning platform.

To have a dispassionate discussion, the following observations must be addressed when confronting our industrial aged PME continuum:

1. *Changing Pace.* The first is the Corps finds itself in an increasingly complex and uncertain operating environment (OE) that continues to change at a rapid pace. The changing OE is mainly the byproduct of both friendly and adversary technological advancements. The Commandant articulated this in his planning guidance, "New threats, new missions, and new technologies require us to adjust our organizational design and modernize our capabilities"<sup>3</sup> and later in his *Force Design 2030*, "our current entry-level and advanced infantry training programs and policies will not meet future demands of our infantry elements."<sup>4</sup> Houthi rebels fighting in Yemen employing ballistic missiles and armed drones demonstrated this increasingly complex OE is not just confined with a peer threat such as China. An industrialized model does not address this adequately, as the rapidly changing OE has greater impacts for Marines in different MOSs—especially when discussing fighting across the domains in future crises and conflicts.

2. *Time out of the FMFs.* The next observation is an established norm that



**MOS "job skills" and PME serve two different but equally important purposes.** (Photo by LCpl Khoa Pelczar.)

poses a profound problem when juxtaposing with the reality of the changing pace: Marines often depart their MOS during tours in the supporting establishment. Even if in a related field in the supporting establishment, it is different than serving within the FMF. Those same Marines are thus far detached from the aforementioned rapidly changing technical and tactical realities. Gen John F. Kelly succinctly explained

---

***Should mechanics and supply staff sergeants ... be concerned with tactical tenets?***

---

the importance of reading with the following truism: "A doctor who doesn't read peer articles and stay attuned to the developments in his field is not the kind of doctor you would want to go to, and the same is true for officers in the Marine Corps."<sup>5</sup> Gen Kelly's truism portends the same doctor is *actually practicing* medicine or their profession—something an infantryman, communicator, logistician, etc. is not doing on recruiting, on the drill field,

or in a host of other billets. The industrial age model of all MOSs attending the same school following a supporting establishment tour away from one's MOS inadequately prepares the leader to return to a unit that has adopted new technologies that have drastically changed the tactics, techniques, and procedures he was familiar with four years ago. I posit that nearly everyone has experiences of serving for or with someone that has returned to the FMF and is an anachronism and nearly subservient to more technically and in turn tactically proficient subordinates. This undeniable reality was the rationale why MARSOC presciently created its own primary MOS to keep special operators within the special operations community while still being competitive for promotion.

Following the Industrial Aged model PME and a tour away from ones MOS—potentially four years in total—leaders problematically now find themselves in billets with far greater responsibility:

Technical skills grow more advanced and complex as Marines assume responsibility for more advanced functions and lead a larger number of Marines. Similarly, tactical skills progress based upon whether a Marine is leading a fire team, squad, platoon,

company, or battalion. Marines must continuously build their technical and tactical proficiency at their current level while also preparing for the next level and leading or mentoring those at more junior levels.<sup>6</sup>

A platoon sergeants' last billet in the FMF could have last been a squad leader but even a fire team leader ... a company commander was last a platoon commander, etc. Regardless of previous and current billet, the biggest responsibility for the now leader is the training of his or her unit which leads to the next observation. How is a leader to train their unit when they are outdated? The importance of having our best Marines serving in key billets in the supporting establishment cannot be diminished, and it is not going away. I am not advocating for that; it is second to importance of only having our best and brightest leading the FMF. To best equip them to lead in the FMF, more and better MOS specific education makes more sense—especially with a rapidly changing operating environment.

3. *The pernicious effect on training.* The third observation will likely be most critics' panacea to this article: this sounds like a training issue and less so an education problem. The Commandant addressed this directly, "While different, education and training are inextricably linked. Education denotes study and intellectual development. Training is primarily learning-by-doing. We will not train without the presence of education; we must not educate without the complementary execution of well-conceived training."<sup>7</sup> Instead of addressing the education problem and acknowledging that our current broad-based, Industrial-Aged education model is educating with the complete absence of training in our formal schools, the Marine Corps has created a three-day operationally focused command preparation course because of the

complexities of today's operational challenges, coupled with the dynamic influence of rapidly changing technologies, there is a need to provide GCE Commanders with specific training in order to enhance their effectiveness in command.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to Advanced Maneuver Warfare Course that supplanted Tactical MAGTF Integration Course as a prerequisite to be a battalion operations officer, we now have GCE and LCE Commanders Course, a MAGTF Communication's Course, and even a GCE Company Commanders Course. These follow on courses before certain billets and command makes one question what exactly is and *should be* taught at EWS or C&S? The Infantry Unit Leaders Course (IULC) provides the paragon for blending education and training. Why this is not replicated in advanced MOS specific schooling is inconsistent with the *Commandant's Planning*

and never seem to escape comfortable crawl phase of training where they sit back in a pressure-free environment and "evaluate" lower-level or small unit training. Those commanders simply do not know.

There are reasons to believe that the goals of PME could be accomplished sufficiently and possibly better through online learning and self-study. It is a fair assessment that if the Marine Corps took the money and effort that goes into resident EWS and shifted them to an online learning platform, the product would greatly improve. Bandwidth, smart phones, apps, and websites such as *Canvas*, up to date video lectures, *Zoom*,



**Is a uniform, one-size-fits-all approach the best model for PME to prepare Marines in the current and future operating environments? (Photo by SSgt Emanuel Melton.)**

*Guidance.* An industrial approach to education with blending MOSs makes it nearly impossible to integrate education with training, as training across MOSs is vastly different. This bifurcation has impacts across the force and is the major contributing factor why commanders—the same ones being educated that will soon be responsible for the training of their units—settle for outdated equipment such as the PVS 14, execute outdated training such as static TACP shoots with the focus on SEADs off of a 1:50k map, are risk averse to a fault with training (especially live fire),

and other communications technologies have raised the potential for online and interactive learning to new heights in 2020. In his *2018 TECOM Commander's Guidance*, then MGen Mullen rightfully said that self-study is the most important aspect of any PME.<sup>9</sup> Virtual learning more than plants the seed to cultivate self-study and can especially be accomplished with readings that culminate with individual papers, presentations, etc. In addition to reallocating funds and the large support structure that supports the schools, the biggest dividend will be the time

returned to Marines. Officers will no longer have to dedicate a year to school, which opens up the possibility for a snap in period with the FMF (something the ACE, the Navy, and Special Operations Forces already does) before assuming command or their next billet. With the year regained, commanders could now have potentially longer command tours or even multiple deployments within one's command window that would make selection even more competitive. Evaluated fitness reports and command screening will have a much better metric with both an online model for certain education (like EWS) but much more so again at the targeted in person MOS school—something everyone in the infantry community knows the benefit of after making IULC a requirement as poor performing staff sergeants often failed the course. This would all be made possible if the model of a supporting establishment tour not only encouraged *but directed* Marines to attend during their tenures. The officers and SNCOs in charge of those units must understand the supporting establishment is not the main effort of the Marine Corps and afford Marines the time needed to complete their education. To think of Marines in the FMF missing a training event and in some cases a SLTE with their Marines—who they are responsible to train—to attend schools is disheartening at best.

An example of a targeted, MOS enhanced specific school is the Infantry Weapons Officer Course. The reality is both simple and undeniable but also troubling: a gunnery sergeant ten months ago is now the resident expert of an infantry battalion with the battalion commander's ear following an abbreviated TBS and five-month Infantry Weapons Officer's Course. The junior gunner being a battalion commander's right-hand man with everything pertaining to the employment of weapons as well as training is a damning

indictment on the Industrial Aged PME model as each of the five company commanders within the infantry battalion have satiated the requirement. However, what if the Corps captured the lessons learned from IWOC and bolstered IULC after divesting from resident Career and Advanced Course? How much better could infantry unit leaders be if the Corps allocated additional time and resources with laser focus? How much better would infantry officers be if they were allocated the additional resources from Weapon and Tactics Instructors Course and Advanced Maneuver Warfare Course? It would go a long way in

---

***to have the most up to date and lethal FMF ... advanced MOS specific education is needed***

---

TECOM's 2nd Focus Area of achieving interoperable units capable of decisive effects.<sup>10</sup> What if instead of receiving a captain that either completed resident EWS, lecture method, all online with CDET, or the Army's MCCC, a battalion commander knew each of his future Company commanders all completed their EWS online and then conducted a resident advanced infantry school prior to them coming to the battalion?

In his *Force Design 2030*, the Commandant stated that he agrees with his predecessor: "The Marine Corps is not organized, trained, equipped, or postured to meet the demands of the rapidly evolving future operating environment."<sup>11</sup> An absent adjective could have been included: educated. In the midst of transforming the Marine Corps along with expected budget cuts, it is paramount that every dollar spent should increase lethality and readiness. Little

is offered with regards to the solution as variables, such as promotion zones, budgets, joint force requirements, etc, are beyond the purview of this article. However, to have the most up to date and lethal FMF, to compensate with competing requirements such as leaving the FMF to fill billets in the supporting establishment, and to have leaders capable of providing the best training to their Marines—advanced MOS specific education is needed. Advanced MOS education would all be made possible through the divestment of our current industrial aged PME model and transitioning to an Information-Aged model.

---

**Notes**

1. Gen David H. Berger, *38th Commandants Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC: July 2019).
2. MajGen William Mullen, *TECOM Commander's Guidance*, (Quantico, VA: July 2018); and Staff, "TECOM's Vision & Strategy for 21st Century Learning," (Quantico, VA: 2020).
3. *38th Commandants Planning Guidance*.
4. Gen David H. Berger, *Force Design 2030*, (Washington, DC: March 2020).
5. James Stavridis and R. Manning Ancell, *The Leaders Bookshelf*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2017)
6. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCDP 7, Learning*, (Washington, DC: 2020).
7. *38th Commandants Planning Guidance*.
8. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MARADMIN 485/19*, (Washington, DC: September 2019).
9. *TECOM Commander's Guidance*.
10. "TECOM Vision & Strategy for 21st Century Learning."
11. *38th Commandants Planning Guidance*.

