

Where Have You Gone MTO?

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Subject Area Logistics

Where Have You Gone MTO?

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“Success in battle is not a function of how many show up, but who they are”

-General Robert H. Barrow

Introduction

Motor Transport plays a significant role in half of the Marine Corps warfighting functions, yet since 1998 the United States Marine Corps has stopped producing and training 3502/ motor transport officers (MTO's). With an expanding non-linear battle space, and a future warfighting philosophy focused on seabasing, now is the time to bring back the MTO's. Having well trained motor transport officers is the right thing to do for our Marines, our Corps, and the Nation.

Before the above topic is examined, it is important to note that many company grade logistics officers (MOS 0402) are successfully serving in MTO billets. The concern is not that the 0402's are incapable of serving as MTO's, but that the competing requirement for them to become proficient in all aspects of logistics prohibits gaining a the solid base of experience absent from the motor transport field.

Background

In 1971, the Marine Corps discontinued assigning and training second lieutenants for the 3502 (MTO) Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). Within 6 years, equipment readiness was at an all time low and a long-term solution was sought. In 1977, Marine lieutenants were again assigned and trained as 3502/ MTO's. Fast forward roughly twenty years to November of 1998 when the Commandant of the Marine Corps directed that "all company grade 3502's be re-designated as 0402 logistics officers..."¹ Once again the Marine Corps discontinued assigning and training officers for the 3502 MOS. The "merging" of the 3502 and 0402 MOS' was based on the recommendations of the Active Duty Force Structure Review Group.² The group's recommendation was based on the need to restructure portions of the Force Service Support Group (FSSG) to meet a potential reduction from 172,000 Marines to 159,000. The restructuring of the FSSG occurred, the reduction did not.

The Current Situation

In the words of the Commanding Officer for 1st Transportation Support Battalion (1st TSB) during Operation

¹ Maradmin 129/98

² Active Duty Force Structure Review Group 31 July 1997:

Iraqi Freedom (OIF), the result of the merging of MOS' has created a group of junior officers that are "a mile wide and a millimeter deep..." 0402 Second Lieutenants logistics officers leave from Logistics Officers Course with three weeks of motor transport training and head to the fleet. During the 1st tour he/ she will have two and a half to three years as a maintenance management officer (MMO), assistant logistics officer (S-4A), and as an MTO before being assigned to a billet outside of the MOS. An MTO is supposed to "command a motor transport unit, perform the general duties of a special staff officer with respect to motor transport matters and advise the commander on deployment and employment of motor transport assets..."³ It can be intimidating for an inexperienced junior officer to advise a senior commander that training or operations needs to be suspended for maintenance or safety reasons.

If the Corps is serious about operational risk management (ORM), safety, and force protection, it must resurrect the MTO MOS. In any Marine unit, the MTO is not only responsible for training and leading the motor transport Marines, but also for licensing and training of the unit's incidental operators. The most recent facts are

³MCO P1200.7V

alarming. Since 1998 (the year the 3502 MOS merged with the 0402 MOS) "the percentage of Class A mishaps and fatalities for tactical vehicles has risen from 17.02% per 100,000 Marines to 26.44% in FY '03..."⁴ This rise was not the result of combat operations in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) or in Iraq. This increase has been a steadily climbed each fiscal year. This is both a safety and force protection issue. These fatalities are both a safety and a force protection issue.

The Requirement

Motor transport Marines deserve officer leadership that is trained, experienced, and dedicated to the safe operation and employment of motor transport assets. The other three major MOS's that are formed around vehicles are the 03XX light armored vehicle (LAV), 18XX assault amphibious vehicle (AAV), and 18XX tanks. Each of these MOS's has trained officers in the ranks of second lieutenant through lieutenant colonel. The argument is not that the Marine Corps needs MTO's because LAV's, AAV's, and tanks have officers, but that time and experience reveal the necessity. Issues arise in occupational specialties

⁴U.S. Naval Safety Center.

that are dependant upon vehicles. Mission essential issues of maintenance, convoy operations, recovery operations, and safety require experience, planning, training and leadership. To achieve improvement in these areas, the Marine Corps needs a group of officers that will remain committed long term to the motor transport community. This is what is best for the Marines.

The Future

Resurrecting the MTO MOS is clearly the right thing to do for the Marines, but it is also the right thing to do for the entire Marine Corps. With the emergence of "seabasing" as the Corps' logistic vision, the significant allocation of resources being committed to motor transport assets, and the expanding non-linear battlespace, it is time to grow and commit experienced officers for the motor transport field.

Seabasing leaves a large portion of the Marine Air Ground Task Force's (MAGTF) logistics structure and assets afloat. According to Logistics Vision and Strategy Center, "future MAGTF logistics and CSS will be structured, equipped and trained to support MAGTF and fleet units

afloat and ashore logistics at the tactical level..."⁵ The "tactical level" will be Regimental Combat Teams (RCT), Combat Service Support Group (CSSG), Transportation Support Group (TSG) and smaller. Who will those future Commanders rely on for sound advisement on motor transport matters? Capt Benotz, the 0402 who spent nine months as an untrained MTO, on a B-billet, then to a PME school and is now the unit's MTO? The Corps must do better.

For the Corps

The Marine Corps invests significant financial resources annually to procure and maintain its people and motor transport assets. Yet, the Marine Corps loses 25 million dollars in equipment damage and 15 Marine lives due to tactical vehicle accidents.⁶ Fiscally, the Marine Corps cannot afford to continue business this way. Morally, it is unacceptable to lose Marine lives to preventable mishaps and accidents. Safe driving programs at the unit level historically were managed by MTO's that were trained and experienced. The safety numbers were much better the decade prior to the merging of the 0402/ 3502 MOS'. These

⁵ Future MAGTF Logistics and Support From the Sea (2010).

⁶ "Marine Corps Statistics."

trained, experienced MTO's no longer reside at the battalion or squadron levels.

Recent operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have illustrated that the battlefield has expanded and is no longer linear. In the past, motor transport support fell under CSS units in the battlefield's rear area. During OIF, "I MEF forces traveled over 2,300 miles of road networks for a straight line distance of 700 miles in roughly three weeks."⁷ These road networks ran the width and depth of the battlefield, and often the motor transport Marines provided their own convoy security. The victory in Iraq was tremendous, but many who were there characterized the Iraqi resistance as "junior varsity," at best. A poorly trained and poorly led transportation unit will become a critical vulnerability that a "varsity" enemy force will exploit.

For the Nation

Finally, bringing back school trained, full time MTO's is better for the Nation. Having officers committed to the long-term health of the motor transport community will save the taxpayers money; by acquiring a viable fleet, save

⁷ Professionals Talk Logistics.

lives through training, and better prepare America's Marine Corps for future operations. The Department of Defense invested \$1.2 billion dollars in the procurement of the medium tactical vehicle replacement (MTVR) 7-ton trucks.⁸ Both the Army and the Marine Corps spearheaded this acquisition. The MTVR was designed carry U.S. forces (and the M-198 Howitzers) into the twenty first century. Yet, apparently this money was invested in the wrong vehicle

As a Marine this author is embarrassed to read after action reports from OIF (MarCorSysCom and I MEF G-4) that state, "the Marine Corps truck fleet needs to be analyzed...the MTVR does not meet all requirements...we also need a replacement for the logistics vehicle system (LVS) and a sturdy trailer for the MTVR."⁹ The taxpayers are paying \$1.2 billion dollars for a truck that in the words of the MarCorSysCom OIF AAR is "too big?" If the Marine Corps had developed officers who possessed the knowledge, experience and position to properly manage its truck fleet, this mistake could have been avoided.

Following the first Gulf War, an interim report to Congress was submitted by the Department of Defense. In it were listed only two shortcomings for the prosecution of

⁸ National Defense magazine

⁹ "1stMarDiv Lessons Learned OIF"

the entire war: intelligence support to the tactical commanders and "off-road mobility limited logistical support. Had the operation lasted longer, maneuver forces would have outrun their support."¹⁰ Twelve years and 1.2 billion dollars later, the Marine Corps still has the wrong trucks? This is unacceptable and further evidence that the country needs professional, experienced motor transport Officers in its Corps.

The number of Marines being lost each year in tactical vehicle mishaps will only begin coming down when changes are made in the motor transport community. As was previously stated the number has been on the rise since 1998. This rise in unnecessary deaths must be addressed and a long-term solution must be implemented. Having well trained, MTO's that are committed to the safety of every operator is the place to start. One only needs to look at the numbers to see the difference that exists in the Marine Corps when it has school trained, full-time MTO's.

Conclusion

The Marine Corps needs to stop paying lip service to the importance of ORM, safety, and force protection and

¹⁰ Conduct of the Persian Gulf Conflict: Interim Report to Congress.

make some fundamental changes. The Marine Corps must show the nation that it can be a good steward of the people and resources she provides by bringing back the 3502 Motor Transport Officer MOS.

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