

SSgt, What LAR did you serve with?

EWS 2005

Subject Area Warfighting

"SSgt, What LAR did you serve with?"

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To

Majors Dixon and Duryea

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"First Sergeant, do any of these platoon sergeants have LAR experience?" asked the frustrated company commander as he looked down at his pile of initial counseling's. "No Sir, but they are 0369's," replied the company first sergeant. "You mean I have three new second lieutenants fresh out of school with no experience in light armored vehicles and three 0369's that are supposed to teach them the tricks of the trade, but don't even know the trade?" lamented the CO. The 1st Sgt gave a beleaguered shrug and said, "At least they are motivated, Sir." "Let me get this straight," said the CO. "The senior enlisted Marine in the company with any LAR experience is my chief dismounted scout, Sgt Gomez, and he's an 0311 who doesn't even have a military vehicle license. I have three platoons of four LAVs in each, with a crew of six members in each vehicle. Half the platoon are 0313s, half are 0311s all being led by two men of which only one has even ridden in a LAV. And that was at school! To top it off, we are deploying in seven months." "Damn" said the tired CO, "By then, they may have learned how the maintenance cycle works, much less how to employ the vehicle as a crew."

The above conversation between the newly appointed LAR company commander and his first sergeant may have never taken place, but is in danger of doing so in the near future. The Marine Corps needs to change the 0369 MOS designation process in order to prevent the loss of experienced staff noncommissioned officers in the Light Armored Reconnaissance community.

Losing the Corporate Knowledge

A catch phrase commonly used in the late 1980's was "passing on the corporate knowledge." This meant ensuring the skills learned within a unit were retained, so as to reducing the chance of the same mistakes and the lessons learned from those mistakes having to be repeated each time

a unit deployed with new personnel. One of the ways to preserve this corporate knowledge was by placing experienced leaders in key positions. Assigning a man with little to no experience to the senior billet within a LAR platoon is detrimental to both equipment and Marine lives. The Marine Corps is doing itself and its Marines a disservice by not re-assigning staff sergeants who were prior LAR crewman to be platoon sergeants in LAR companies.

The current LAV crewman completes the 0311 basic infantry rifleman course and then the 0313 basic LAV Crewman Course at Camp Pendleton, California.¹ And even though the LAV he was assigned to is often older than he is, the Marine stood a very good chance of filling the billet of vehicle commander (VC) before his first re-enlistment. A billet, which has him, entrusted with lives of five to six other Marines, a LAV, and its associated equipment totaling over \$1 million. After two to four deployments, it is likely the 0313 will move on to his "B" billet for three years or so, and if he does well he will earn the rank of staff sergeant and the MOS 0369. As a 0369, it is equally as probable that he will end up a platoon sergeant for a weapons platoon in an infantry battalion, instead of a platoon sergeant for a LAR platoon. The Marine will have never been around Mk-19s, M2s, or even

mortars, but he will be given the responsibility of training and employing his men with these weapons systems. Conversely, the incoming 0369 assigned to a LAR platoon, who was a mortar man all his career, will not have a clue how to operate, maintain, and employ his LAV-25 and train his crew, much less advise his platoon commander using his vast LAR experience.

When asked in an interview if Manpower and Reserve Enlisted Affairs (MMEA) has a policy for assigning 0369 Marines with a 0313 background to LAR battalions, the 0369 Monitor stated that MMEA has "no policy" concerning the background experience of 0369s; It is mainly concerned with assigning a 0369 to a unit that is in need of that billet MOS.²

Retaining the Corporate Knowledge

The three ways to insure that the LAR battalions do not lose their corporate knowledge at the SNCO ranks are:

- 1) Change the current 0369 MOS to 0370 LAR Unit Leader for those SNCOs that have a background in LAR and/or attend the LAV Leaders Course, 2) Keep the MOS designation of 0313 from Pvt - MGySgt, or 3) Change the policy for 0313 Marines becoming 0369s to delay until they reach the rank of Gunnery Sergeant.

0370 LAR Unit Leader

Upon graduation from the LAV Leaders Course, staff sergeants are presented with a dog tag that has the number **0370** stamped on it. This is a symbolic gesture to recognize achieving the requisite knowledge to employ and train LAR crewmen. This symbolic gesture should be changed into a formal assignment of the MOS of 0370, LAR Unit Leader. Assigning the primary MOS of 0370 to SNCOs upon completion of the LAV Leader's Course is the first way to ensure the LAR battalions do not lose the corporate knowledge at the SNCO ranks.

In an interview with Captain McConnellⁱ, he stated that a 0313 who obtains the rank of staff sergeant should remain within the LAR community for his career. He is an advocate of the change to 0370. He believes that a 0369 without prior LAR experience can be integrated into the LAR community, but only after he has successfully completed the LAV Leaders Course. Captain McConnell's reasoning for retaining 0313s within the LAR community is that, much like the Tank and Amphibious Assault community, the LAR community needs to retain Marines with the specialized

ⁱCaptain Lucas McConnell is a former LAR platoon commander and company executive officer and a former Officer in Charge of the LAV Leaders course: the Marine Corps' formal school for LAR platoon commanders and platoon sergeants.

technical and logistical skills necessary to maintain and operate the light armored vehicle.³

0313 Staff Sergeant

Many "old Corps" Marines cannot stand the thought of a infantry SNCO receiving any other MOS but that of 0369. There is some validity to this. A SNCO who has eight to ten years time in service has valuable experience that all infantry units can benefit from.

The argument is not against the fact that all 0369s have extremely valuable experience that young platoon commanders and infantry platoons can benefit from. It is instead, arguing that a platoon sergeant with a LAR background has specific technical and tactical experience that cannot be effectively obtained by reading a manual or publication. A platoon commander can read a manual. What a young lieutenant, fresh out of school, needs is a right-hand man who can draw on years of experience employing a LAV and its crew to assist the platoon commander in making tactically and technically sound decisions as they relate to the LAV.

The second way to keep these experienced staff sergeants in the LAR community is to change when a SNCO obtains the MOS of 0369 should be made. Several technical MOSs in the Marine Corps do not change their SCNO MOS

designation at the rank of staff sergeant, due the need for technically-specific staff sergeants. Because working with LAVs involves technically specific knowledge and skills, the light armored vehicle crewman occupational field should reflect the MOS 0313 from the rank of private to the rank of staff sergeant.

The current line number for a company gunnery sergeant in a LAR company calls for a 0369 Gunnery Sergeant. The "Company Gunny" in a LAR company does not directly work with young platoon commanders and, thus, does not have to have the technical skills to advise them with. Instead, like every other Company Gunny in the infantry occupational field, he has to be a master at procurement, stowage, and distribution of all logistical materials for the company. Because of this, once a 0313 reaches the rank of gunnery sergeant, he can then receive the MOS of 0369. Waiting until the rank of gunnery sergeant before Marines change their MOS from 0313 to 0369 will serve the needs of the Marines, the Marine Corps, and the LAR community.

0313 Pvt - MGySgt

The third way LAR battalions can ensure they keep experienced SNCOs in their community is to maintain an MOS designation of 0313 from private to master gunnery sergeant. The reconnaissance community has already

addressed and responded to the need for retaining Marines with specialized skills.

The recent change in the reconnaissance community to permit 0321 Reconnaissance Men to maintain their MOS up to the rank of Master Gunnery Sergeant allows the reconnaissance community to retain the corporate knowledge within its units.

The Counter-argument

The counter-argument will be made that "pigeon-holing" or "bottle-necking" a staff sergeant within the LAR community reduces the Marine's opportunity for a well-rounded education and for promotion. Marines need to be well rounded and exposed to a variety of billets in order to become the complete MAGTF Marine.

"B" billets are for obtaining experiences outside an MOS and LAR Marines get the true MAGTF experience by virtue their missions: Combat Service Support when dealing with ordering and tracking parts for corrective maintenance and planning for re-fueling during operations, not to mention planning for food and water re-supply when conducting operations up to 50 kilometers in front of the main body; Air Combat Element when often beyond the range of artillery and naval surface support and when conducting re-fueling operations; and working for the Command Element, as seen at

CAX. Promotional opportunities and billet availabilities are not an issue due to the size of the LAR community and the nature of advancement within the Marine Corps.

MSgt Mitchell, the 0321 monitor and draftee of the point paper that was instrumental in the Reconnaissance community's change in its MOS designation, demonstrated on the enlisted grade shaping model (EGSR) that there would be no adverse effects on promotion opportunities within the LAR community if the MOS designator remained 0313 from private to master gunnery sergeant. He explained that with the different year groups and the amount of personnel in the LAR battalions that there would be no stagnation with promotions at the SNCO ranks.⁴

Conclusion

In an interview with Colonel Powersⁱⁱ, he stated that LAR units are the "most versatile, diverse units in the Corps", they need a "high level of expertise, similar to Recon". Colonel Powers believes that the LAR communities needs to retain its experienced SNCOs and that changing the MOS from 0369 to 0370 or keeping it at 0313 from Pvt-MgySgt are ways this could be accomplished.⁵

ⁱⁱ Colonel Jeffery Powers is a retired Marine and former Operations Officer for 3rd LAR Battalion during Desert Storm/Shield and former Battalion Commander for 1st LAR Battalion. He has extensive experience in leading units, such as, Reconnaissance and LAR that require specialized skill sets.

Whichever method is chosen, a change in MOS designation at the SNCO ranks is vital to the LAR battalions in passing on the corporate knowledge to future generations. Not do so is akin to re-inventing the proverbial wheel every time a prior 0313 staff sergeant walks out the door.

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³ Captain Lucas McConnell, interview by Mark Brown, January 4, 2005.

⁴ Master Gunnery Sergeant T. G. Mitchell, 0321 monitor, MMEA-82, USMC, interview by Mark Brown, January 5, 2005.

⁵ Colonel Jeffery Powers, USMC, Ret., interview by Mark Brown