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In order to evolve, the Supply Community must address three specific areas in which its current way of operating must evolve to match the Commandant's envisioned future: integration with Naval supply capabilities, modernization of supply systems and procedures, and improved manpower management. Following nearly two decades of conducting land-based operations, the United States Marine Corps aims to transform itself as it returns to its World War II identity as an amphibious force. Predictions about the future operating environment, as well as advances in adversary capabilities and doctrine, have prompted a re-examination of the way the Marine Corps fights, resulting in Commandant of the Marine Corps General Berger publishing the Commandant's Planning Guidance (CPG). In response, the Deputy Commandant of Installations and Logistics (DC, I&L) published Sustaining the Force which describes a future model for logistics support based on the concepts presented in the CPG. This paper examines the Marine Corps Supply Community's ability to satisfy the lines of effort outlined in Sustaining the Force and ultimately support the concepts presented in the CPG. It discusses the shortfalls of the current model and offers solutions that can be implemented in order to create a more viable future model of supply support.

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**Evolving to Support the Future Corps:  
Implications of the CPG on the Supply Community**

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OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
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## Executive Summary

**Title:** Evolving to Support the Future Corps: Implications of the CPG on the Supply Community

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**Thesis:** In order to evolve, the Supply Community must address three specific areas in which its current way of operating must evolve to match the Commandant's envisioned future: integration with Naval supply capabilities, modernization of supply systems and procedures, and improved manpower management.

**Discussion:** Following nearly two decades of conducting land-based operations, the United States Marine Corps aims to transform itself as it returns to its World War II identity as an amphibious force. Predictions about the future operating environment, as well as advances in adversary capabilities and doctrine, have prompted a re-examination of the way the Marine Corps fights, resulting in Commandant of the Marine Corps General Berger publishing the *Commandant's Planning Guidance (CPG)*. In response, the Deputy Commandant of Installations and Logistics (DC, I&L) published *Sustaining the Force* which describes a future model for logistics support based on the concepts presented in the *CPG*. This paper examines the Marine Corps Supply Community's ability to satisfy the lines of effort outlined in *Sustaining the Force* and ultimately support the concepts presented in the *CPG*. It discusses the shortfalls of the current model and offers solutions that can be implemented in order to create a more viable future model of supply support.

**Conclusion:** The current model for supply support is built on outdated processes, systems, and concepts that were suitable for past conflicts but are not feasible for the envisioned future of warfare. Like the rest of the operating forces, the Supply Community must evolve in order to maintain effectiveness in the prosecution of future wars.

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## **Preface**

As a Ground Supply Officer in the Marine Corps, I am a member of the Supply Community and am thus affected by the issues outlined in this paper. Earlier in my career, my focus was on completing my required tasks in order to contribute to the unit mission, satisfy my commanding officer, and advance in my career. Like most other junior officers, organizational issues were not of much concern, but as I gained more experience, I observed that the Supply Community seemed to advance at a slower pace than other communities such as the Infantry, Aviation, or Intelligence communities when it came to education, equipment, and processes. While those communities invested heavily in adapting in order to keep pace with the changes in the conduct of war, the Supply Community has held onto outdated systems and methods, advancing at a much slower pace. This difference may have gone unnoticed (or ignored) up to this point, or it may not have seemed relevant since the current model proved to be sufficient for past conflicts. However, I fear that the next evolution in Marine Corps warfighting doctrine may expose this stagnation in development at the expense of being unable to properly support future warfighting operations.

The goal of this paper is to raise awareness of the need for evolution within the Supply Community. As I advance from tactical level assignments and responsibilities to the operational and strategic level, I have a duty to share my experiences, feedback, and insights in order to cultivate the community. I hope that this paper stimulates a discussion of what advancements must be made, and that the concerns that are voiced within reach the policymakers at Deputy Commandant of Installations and Logistics (DC, I&L). The ultimate goal is that the Supply Community forges a way ahead in building a more capable model of support, even if the

solutions implemented are not my own. At the end of the day, what matters is that the Supply Community is prepared for the challenges it may face in future conflict.

## **Introduction**

### Background

The United States Marine Corps stands on the cusp of a drastic transformation in the way it fights wars. After nearly two decades of conducting land based operations in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF), the focus of the Marine Corps has shifted back to its World War II identity as an amphibious force. In the *Commandant's Planning Guidance (CPG)*, General David Berger envisions a Marine Corps that is more closely tied its naval roots, operating primarily as a team with the United States Navy in order to maintain a “persistent naval forward presence to enable sea control and denial operations.”<sup>1</sup> This identity is not new. In fact, it more closely aligns with the Marine Corps’ prescribed functions per 10 U.S.C. § 5063, which states that the Marine Corps conducts operations that are “essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign.”<sup>2</sup> Essentially, the Marine Corps is being reset to the identity that it had established for itself in the wake of World War II.

While the functions that the Marine Corps must execute are not new,<sup>3</sup> the environment in which the Marine Corps must operate has changed drastically since its responsibilities were last amended in 1956.<sup>4</sup> These changes, outlined in the last published *National Defense Strategy*, have created new challenges to amphibious operations that have forced the Corps to reevaluate its doctrine as a whole. Most significantly, the U.S.’s potential adversaries have developed more effective anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities that challenge the U.S.’s long assumed maritime superiority within the littorals, as well as capabilities within the cyberspace and space domains that can challenge the U.S.’s ability to deploy forces and operate in a contested environment.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to advancements in adversary capabilities, the future environment offers uncertainty as to what kind of war to expect and prepare for. Some warfighting analysts such as Max Boot believe that irregular warfare will be the predominant form of conflict,<sup>6</sup> and international studies analyst John Vrolyk asserts that even China would prefer an insurgent approach to high-intensity conventional conflict with the U.S.<sup>7</sup> Others such as Colin Gray predict that the future will contain both conventional and irregular conflicts.<sup>8</sup> Others have pointed to hybrid warfare, described by Frank Hoffman as the “tailored mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal behavior in the same time and battlespace,”<sup>9</sup> as the next predominant threat, with most advocates of hybrid warfare citing the combined use of conventional and unconventional forces and tactics by Russia in its annexation of Crimea.<sup>10</sup> Regardless of who is right, the possibility that the U.S. could find itself in any of the above conflicts presents a requirement for versatility within its military forces.

In response, Commandant of the Marine Corps General David Berger has prescribed a way ahead for the Marine Corps to overcome these challenges with respect to its mission by identifying five priority focus areas for the Corps’ evolution: force design, warfighting, education and training, core values, and command leadership.<sup>11</sup> This serves as the framework for General Berger’s vision of how the Marine Corps must be composed in order to conduct its Title 10 functions in the modern operating environment.

As General Berger envisions the employment of new doctrinal concepts in order to accomplish the Marine Corps’ mission, it logically follows that the Marine Corps must also examine and adjust its model for logistics support in order to create a logistics system capable of sustaining the Marine Corps in its envisioned future form. The Deputy Commandant of Installations and Logistics (DC, I&L) has identified this need for innovation and issued its own

vision for the future of logistics operations through its own community-specific derivative of the *CPG, Sustaining the Force*. Here, DC, I&L states that “Marine Corps logistics must sustain combat power in contested environments”<sup>12</sup> and identifies four lines of effort in accomplishing this imperative: enabling global logistics awareness, diversifying distribution, improving sustainment, and optimizing installations to support sustained operations.<sup>13</sup> While *Sustaining the Force* presents the ways (the aforementioned lines of effort) to achieving a strategic endstate – creating a logistics system that enables the Marine Corps to fight globally in accordance with its Title 10 responsibilities – it has left the determination of the means to the Marine Corps Logistics Community. This paper seeks to identify feasible actions that can be taken to meet this intent, with a specific focus on the Supply Community.

### Thesis

The Marine Corps Supply Community must evolve in order to effectively support the future warfighting concepts described in the *CPG*. The current paradigm for supply support is the result of processes, systems, and concepts that were suitable for past models of conflict such as OIF and OEF, but are not compatible with the priority focus areas of the *CPG* or the lines of effort outlined in *Sustaining the Force*. In order to evolve, the Supply Community must address three specific areas in which its current way of operating must change to match the Commandant’s envisioned future: integration with Naval supply capabilities, modernization of supply systems and procedures, and improved manpower management.

### Methodology

This paper focuses on the Marine Corps Supply Community (referred to hereafter as the Supply Community), which entails the Marines, civil service workers, units, subordinate sections, and headquarters elements that execute, plan, or establish doctrine or systems for any of

the functions of supply.<sup>14</sup> The Supply Community has its share of problems that are preventing it from meeting the standard expected for future warfighting efforts, but this paper focuses on three key areas in which current systems, practices, or procedures within the Supply Community do not yet align with the desired future state articulated in the *CPG* or *Sustaining the Force*: Naval integration, modernization, and manpower.<sup>15</sup> In each of these areas, the current constructs, systems, and procedures either fall short of the Commandant's guidance or cannot be executed while adhering to the principles of effective logistics support, specifically responsiveness, simplicity, and flexibility.<sup>16</sup> This paper will outline the ways in which the Supply Community falls short in these areas and offer solutions that can be implemented in order to bring the Supply Community into alignment with the Commandant's desired endstate, DC, I&L's methodology, and Marine Corps doctrinal standards.

## **Naval Integration**

### Relevance

In *Sustaining the Force*, Naval integration is an important aspect of enabling global logistics awareness, specifically the ability to "rapidly and accurately... determine available resources (i.e. "who has it" and/or "can I get it?")."<sup>17</sup> Marine Corps supply personnel must be able to see beyond their organic assets and understand what resources its sister services can provide in order to increase responsiveness. With a renewed focus on fleet operations, the most likely available sources in the Marine Corps' future will be those of the Navy. The Navy's sustainment system is designed to quickly source critical supplies to its afloat forces through programs such as PMO Prime, which enables access to centralized resources and allows requisitions to be tracked and managed in real time,<sup>18</sup> and the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA)

Prime Vendor Program, which utilizes contractor support to improve responsiveness for supplies, particularly Class I (subsistence) and Class IX (repair parts). Marine Corps supply personnel should be intimately familiar with these programs and their capabilities, as they offer greater responsiveness than relying solely on the Marine Corps supply system.

### Issues

Marine Corps supply training does not adequately familiarize supply Marines with the Navy's concepts or procedures for supply support, overarching logistics framework, or general naval operations, and the opportunities to do so are few and far between. This results in Marine units overly relying on the organic resources and the Marine Corps supply system when the Navy possesses a system that is better suited for deployed, austere environments. While this may have been sufficient for land-based operations such as OIF and OEF in which the Marine Corps was able to establish large forward supply bases, the proverbial "iron mountain," it is not a feasible model for the Commandant's vision for future warfare in which forces and assets must be dispersed in order to effectively fight against a distant or distributed adversary and reduce said adversary's ability to target friendly forces/assets.<sup>19</sup> *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 4 (Logistics)* warns that logistics assets are "not merely subject to attack but, in many cases, are the preferred targets of military action."<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, the large forward supply bases and the Maritime Prepositioned Force (MPF) ships of past operating constructs must be considered likely targets that could be exploited by an adversary that possesses long range munitions.

The Marine Corps supply system is not responsive enough to rapidly provide forces dispersed throughout an area of operations (AO) with the necessary supplies, primarily because the lead time from requisition to receipt is unacceptably long. When submitting requisitions, the Marine Corps supply system forwards requisitions from the using unit to its respective Supply

Management Unit (SMU). The SMUs are located in Camp Pendleton, California for I Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), Camp Lejeune, North Carolina for II MEF, and Camp Kinser, Okinawa, Japan for III MEF. This means that supplies must be transported from the SMU to the respective theater of operations, a lengthy pipeline.

First, orders are sent to a major port of embarkation (POE) where they remain until the container holding that order accumulates enough cargo to be loaded and shipped. From there, the order travels by surface to an in-theater logistics hub, where it must be located and processed by expeditors (Marines who ensure that cargo for their units is properly identified and forwarded). The order is ultimately loaded onto an Underway Replenishment (UNREP) ship for delivery. Depending on the UNREP ship's area of responsibility (AOR) and the using unit's position in the AOR, it could take up to an additional 14 days before the requisition finally reaches the requesting unit. Overall, it could take up a month for an item to arrive at the using unit from the time the SMU receives a requisition. This kind of lead time is not sufficient for the tempo that will be required in the execution of concepts laid out in the *CPG* such as Distributed Operations and Expeditionary Advanced Basing Operations.

In comparison, the Navy's systems drastically reduce the lead time from requisition to end user delivery. Items available through the DLA Prime Vendor program may reach the ship in one to seven days, depending on the positioning of all the ships involved, and whether air lift is available. With PMO Prime, requisition fulfillment may still originate in the U.S., but items are shipped to the in-theater logistics hub by the most expedient commercial means available (UPS, FedEx, DHL, etc.). By traveling via commercial means (usually air), shipments are not subjected to long idle times at warehouses and ports as with government shipping means. This allows items to reach the in-theater logistics hub anywhere from a few days to a couple of weeks

faster than government shipping means. The advantages of Naval systems such as the DLA Prime Vendor program and PMO Prime greatly benefit Marine Corps units afloat with expediting high-priority orders, but supply officers are often not educated on these capabilities upon joining a MEU, and it takes time on ship to build rapport with the Navy and learn the capabilities and limitations of these programs and establish agreed upon business rules for the use of the Naval systems. Marine Corps supply personnel must become more familiar with the Navy's logistics resources and capabilities and develop relationships with Naval supply personnel earlier in deployment preparation.

Another problem is that Marine Corps training exercises do not reflect an at-sea environment that would allow supply personnel to reinforce the education that they have received with practical application and evaluation. The overwhelming majority of training exercises, from company and battalion-level exercises to large events such as Integrated Training Exercise (ITX), take place on land where Marines can circumvent or hide a lack of proficiency by utilizing the base ServMart, utilizing a commercial source via Government Commercial Purchase Card (GCPC), or borrowing from/bartering with adjacent units (known within the Marine Corps as the drug deal). And exercises in which Marines embark such as Composite Training Unit Exercise (COMPTUEX) or MEU Certification Exercise (CERTEX) are of a short enough duration that supply considerations can be largely planned for in advance and supply personnel go largely unchallenged during the event. Overall, there is no realistic training venue that simulates the restrictive nature of being aboard a ship and forces supply personnel to exercise their knowledge of integrated logistics. Subsequently, there is no way to accurately gauge a supply section's ability to conduct supply operations afloat until the unit is actually

deployed. A common adage in the Marine Corps is that Marines should train how they fight, but supply personnel are not held to that standard when it comes to proficiency at operations.

### Solutions

If the Marine Corps is to become better integrated with the Navy, then Marine Corps supply officers and chiefs must be more thoroughly trained in how to access the capabilities of the Navy's logistics system, meaning that Marine/Navy cooperation must be reinforced in the form of joint PME. Marine and Naval officers learning together and understanding each other's requirements will increase both the efficiency and effectiveness of supply operations, but there are not enough current opportunities for such team building and learning to occur. One such opportunity is the Navy Supply Corps School's (NSCS) Supply Officer Department Head Course (SODHC). Within the course, Marine supply officers are educated on the Navy supply system and supply chain and the resources that the Navy can access while underway that are more responsive than the Marine Corps supply system. This course should be required training for all company grade supply officers, or at the very least those who are preparing to deploy as part of a Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), but enrollment is actually extremely restrictive for Marines. Of the 433 active duty company grade supply officers,<sup>21</sup> as few as eight schools seats per year have been authorized for Marine attendees. Why would such a valuable course be so restricted? Competitive slots for PME make sense for programs such as Command and Staff or the School of Advanced Warfare, which target a few highly qualified individuals for specific purposes. Statistically, only the top performing officers will be selected for command or to serve as a MAGTF planner. However, every supply officer who serves in an infantry battalion or MEU-supporting combat logistics battalion stands the chance of being assigned to a MEU.

Although the idea of all company grade supply officers attending SODHC would benefit the supply officer community, an understandable limiting factor is the throughput capability of NSCS. SODHC is required training for all Navy supply officers who will serve in a ship supply officer billet, and the remaining space left to train Marine officers may be the limiting factor. Even so, there are ways to get this valuable training to the Marine Corps supply officer population. If possible, the Navy could consider expanding class sizes. An alternative would be integrating the applicable portions of the SODHC curriculum into Marine Corps training such as the Intermediate MAGTF Logistics Officers Course (IMLOC), which currently only covers a precursory overview of Naval Logistics Integration (NLI), but does not provide in depth training or resources concerning Naval logistics.

In addition to PME, the Marine Corps should also seek ways to integrate the Navy or Naval logistics concepts into its training. In the *CPG*, the Commandant states that education should not be conducted in the absence of complementary training and vice versa,<sup>22</sup> so it is important that the Marine Corps reinforces any PME changes with training opportunities that present the Marines with realistic situations that require the use of joint logistics knowledge. Ideally, this would mean an increase in opportunities for Marines to embark on ships and train afloat with their Navy counterparts. However, this concept is likely not feasible due to the increased costs that would be incurred with additional ship operating time and the disruption to ships' maintenance cycles. In place of this, the Marine Corps should seek opportunities to inject supply training into other venues within the pre-deployment training schedule. For example, training exercises could include a "Naval Cell," similar to a Red Cell. The Naval Cell would simulate interaction with the Navy crew and systems. Marine supply sections would then be required to work through the Naval cell as part of their exercise evaluation, solving real, time-

compressed problems as they would on a ship instead of driving to ServMart or a commercial source to conduct an open purchase. The Marine Corps could also implement an immersion program for supply personnel preparing to deploy. In this concept, a soon-to-deploy supply section could be assigned to a currently afloat ship (not necessarily an amphibious ship) in order to observe and learn from the ship supply crew and witness Naval supply operations in person. Whatever route is chosen, the bottom line is that Marines are taught to train how they fight, and the Marine Corps must apply this philosophy to combat service support in the same way that it is applied to combat arms.

### **Modernization**

#### Relevance

The future of war for the Marine Corps places many demands on the Marine Corps supply section. The requirement to support dispersed forces described in the *CPG* means that supply personnel must be able to maintain timely and accurate visibility of supplies as they move throughout an AO. This is also articulated in *Sustaining the Force*, which states that global logistics awareness will be “data driven” and should have the “ability to ‘see’ what is in the supply chain – to include neighboring units, other Services, coalition and industry partners.”<sup>23</sup> A capability of this magnitude cannot be achieved without effective supply systems. Care must be taken when developing future supply systems in order to ensure that they enhance logistics operations, not hinder them. Future systems should be deployable to expeditionary environments, “efficient to operate and easy to maintain,” and should seek to maximize standardization where possible in order to enhance interoperability and increase efficiency.<sup>24</sup> Incompatibility of systems and equipment will only increase friction.<sup>25</sup>

#### Issues

First and foremost, the Marine Corps continues to cling to outdated systems, and even when implementing new systems it fails to invest in modern features that other services have implemented in order to increase responsiveness, accuracy, and productivity within the Supply Community. Instead of achieving simplicity, which fosters efficiency in logistics operations,<sup>26</sup> the technical side of the Marine Corps supply system has become a Frankenstein's monster. It is a melding of old and new systems that do not always interface appropriately and add more time and work to a Marine's schedule instead of alleviating it. This is a direct contradiction to *MCDP 4's* warning of how incompatible systems add friction to the logistics operations.

The Frankenstein's monster mentioned above was supposed to have been eliminated with the introduction of Global Combat Support Systems - Marine Corps (GCSS-MC), but the payoff has failed to materialize in tactical supply operations. First, GCSS-MC is notoriously slow and cumbersome to operate, even after multiple updates. This is largely in part due to its interface which has added significantly to the time required to run basic transactions in comparison to GCSS-MC's predecessor, Asset Tracking Logistics and Supply System (ATLASS). To compliment GCSS-MC, the change in interface has nearly eliminated some of the more time-consuming property accounting issues such as quantitative discrepancies between the Mechanized Allowance List (MAL) and Consolidated Memorandum Receipts (CMR), but numerous other keypunching errors are still commonplace. Clerks still select incorrect serial numbers for transactions or incorrectly transcribe serial numbers for new equipment for a number of reasons: misidentifying characters, looking at the wrong number on a piece of equipment, using a piece number instead of a set number, or simply "fat-fingering" the keyboard. Clerks also still commit requisitioning errors such as ordering the wrong item or over/under ordering due to not conducting the appropriate technical research for each National Stock

Number (NSN) – which entails verifying information such as the item nomenclature, cost, and unit of issue – before placing an order. Technology has not error-proofed the human transaction process, and the Marine Corps has only responded by stripping away the authority to transact at the unit level with directives such as the Naval Message that restricts the authority to add or modify information for newly fielded equipment in GCSS-MC to Marine Corps Systems Command (MARCORSYSCOM).<sup>27</sup> Because of this, voucherable transactions and serial number changes that a Marine of the rank of Private should be trained to execute<sup>28</sup> are being consolidated at MARCORSYSCOM, which is counterproductive to the tempo that our supply system is expected to maintain.

Second, GCSS-MC still functions poorly in deployed environments. A web-based program, its ability to function properly is dependent on an internet-enabled environment. GCSS-MC has performed poorly due to latency and the limited bandwidth availability in austere environments.<sup>29</sup> In the event that connectivity is lost, GCSS-MC is entirely inoperable. Presently, internet connectivity is a critical requirement for the Marine Corps supply system, which in turn has caused our systems to become a critical vulnerability that can be targeted by adversaries.

### Solutions

In the quest for modernization, whatever new systems are built should also feature a certain degree of flexibility in execution and redundancy in capability to avoid the connectivity dependence that has slowly enveloped the military, to include the Supply Community. Web-based applications have their benefits such as common databases and real time or near real time data transaction, but they are useless in an internet-denied environment. In order to overcome this restriction, the supply system of the future must have an offline operating mode that allows

supply Marines to transact without internet access and send the transaction via other means. This could be via disk, similar to the past concept of sending a courier file to a central processing agent, or by allowing the system to operate offline and then integrate and reconcile with the online data once connectivity is restored. Also, training in analog means of supply transacting should be reinstated. Marines are already trained to correctly fill out some manual forms such as the DD Form 1348 1A (Issue Release/Receipt Document), which is used to document most custody change transactions and is already configured in the traditional 80-card column format. However, they would also be required to be trained on obsolete forms such as the DD Form 1348 (DoD Manual Single Line Item Requisition Document) for requisitioning and the Equipment Repair Order Shopping List (EROSL) for maintenance requirements.

An argument against the reintroduction of manual forms is that redistributing the burden for accuracy back to human users will lead to an increase in transaction errors. First, the use of manual forms is not meant to be a primary form of transacting. This paper has already referenced improvements to the current supply system that leverage the use of present or emerging technology. Per the *CPG*, the Supply Community should be seeking to maximize effectiveness and productivity by exploiting technology. However, the *CPG* also accepts that the Marine Corps does not possess the capability to “maintain advantages in the information environment across all seven warfighting functions”<sup>30</sup> in a degraded C2 environment. In short, even though the Marine Corps, to include the Supply Community, should be exploiting technological advances, contingency procedures that include the use of offline or analog systems should still be developed and trained to in the event that Marines are required to operate in an environment that does allow for connectivity.

Second, as mentioned before, human error has never actually been removed from the transaction process. The nature of the errors has changed, but GCSS-MC has not eliminated the chance that Marines will make mistakes. Regardless of the system or the safeguards, accuracy and efficiency in supply transacting still depend on the same basic points of proficiency. Clerks must conduct technical research when requisitioning to ensure that the correct item and variant, quantity, etc. are ordered, and they must know how to locate the correct serial numbers to be recorded in the system of record, understand parent-child relationships, and understand when to use individual serial numbers versus set numbers. This level of expected proficiency requires that supply Marines be well-trained, and that lack of training will not be mitigated by technology.

## **Manpower**

### Relevance

In the *CPG*, General Berger identifies talent management as an area that requires attention. While most of the discussion of the Supply Community to this point has been focused on systems and processes, the human element is far too important to be neglected in an examination of Marine Corps Supply. *MCDP 4* refers to people as “most important element of any logistics system.”<sup>31</sup> No matter how efficient and autonomous logistics systems become, they will not negate the importance of the actual Marines who execute supply operations. The Marine Corps will still require well-trained and capable-thinking individuals to operate such systems and equipment. However, *MCDP 4* goes beyond the technical proficiency of individuals when stating the importance of the human element. It also stresses the role of leadership in the success of logistics operations, stating that “effective leadership is the key to effective logistics.”<sup>32</sup> The Supply Community, just like the Combat Arms Community, relies on the intangible benefits of

strong leadership such as teamwork, trust, and initiative in order to excel.<sup>33</sup> In short, the Marine Corps must invest in its logisticians at all levels – from its tactical executors to its strategic planners – or the improvements gained through any technological and procedural changes will be nullified by incompetency.

### Issues

The high turnover rate of Marines is one of the main degraders of performance within the Supply Community. At the battalion level, the Officer in Charge (OIC) is often assuming the role of Supply Officer for the first time. The OIC is often a second lieutenant who is executing his first assignment since graduating from the Ground Supply Officer's Course (GSOC). While the inexperience of a new Supply Officer is partly offset by the experience of the Supply Chief, there are certain responsibilities inherent to the Supply Officer that the Supply Chief is unfamiliar with, and the Supply Officer must learn on his/her own. These include basic things such as understanding the relationships between the Supply Officer, the Commanding Officer, the Executive Officer, the various other battalion staff members, and other elements of the battalion. This also includes understanding how to leverage the numerous details and caveats of the federal laws and regulations, DoD directives, and Marine Corps orders that govern the Supply Community. Finally, this includes understanding how to effectively plan and execute budgeting and accounting<sup>34</sup> over the course of the fiscal year.

There are measures in place to mitigate this steep learning curve for new Supply Officers such as the requirement for standard operating procedures (SOPs) and turnover binders<sup>35</sup> and the mentorship and guidance provided by regimental and division supply sections. Despite this, it takes a Supply Officer about three years to master the tasks and responsibilities associated with the billet, by which point he/she is on the verge of completing their tour and departing for an

intermediate level account or a regimental billet. Under the best case scenario, the departing Supply Officer will have up to three or four weeks to conduct an in-person turnover with his/her successor. Under the worst case, the departing Supply Officer will depart prior to his/her successor's arrival, leaving the billet gapped for up to month. Either way, that departing Supply Officer leaves with a wealth of experiential knowledge that is difficult to capture in an SOP or turnover binder, and the battalion is brought back down to "square one" in terms of efficiency.

While the knowledge base of the Supply Officer billet resets every three years, the turnover rate within the individual work sections is even more rapid. Junior Marines (for this purpose, Private First Class through Sergeant) begin in one of the traditional functions: requisition management, fiscal, or property management (either the Mechanized Allowance List or subcustody records). From that initial assignment, they are cycled through the remaining billets in order to build a well-rounded understanding of supply operations in preparation for eventual assignment as a Supply Chief. This construct is beneficial to the individual Marine, but it is detrimental to supply operations within that section since Marines seldom stay in a billet for more than a year to a year and a half as they advance in rank. By the time that Marine has full mastery of the procedures, technical requirements, and other nuances of a billet, it is already time to move on. As with the Supply Officer billet, this equates a frequent loss of proficiency that reduces accuracy across all performance metrics. If the Marine Corps is to improve the way it conducts supply operations, then it must change the practices that dictate management of supply personnel.

### Solutions

The first and most immediate step that the Marine Corps should take is to finally merge the 3043 (Supply Administrations and Operations Specialist) and 3051 (Warehouse Clerk)

military occupational specialties (MOS). It once made sense to have to separate MOSs, as two different skillsets were required for supply Marines. According to the Marine Corps MOS Manual, the 3043 MOS requires mostly clerical/technical skills such as computer usage, scan and retrieval system usage, pulling reports, and maintaining records.<sup>36</sup> In contrast, the 3051 requires more manual/laborious skills such as general shipping/receiving procedures, inventory care and safekeeping, and material handling equipment (MHE) operation.<sup>37</sup> The 3043 MOS has traditionally been considered to be the more technically demanding MOS, requiring a clerical (CL) score of 103 on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) in comparison to a required score of 90 for a 3051.<sup>38</sup> While this construct may have made sense prior to the 2000s, the integration of technology throughout the entire Marine Corps has blurred the line between the two MOSs to the point that is impractical to separate them.

Marine Corps warehousing records are now in computerized databases, not just paper files and inventory cards. 3051 Marines have been required to become proficient in computer usage just like their 3043 counterparts in order to use inventory management systems such as Broadened Arrangement of Resources from A Basic Accessory Relocation Application-Supply Issue and Recovery System (BARBARA SIRS), Warehouse Information System (WIS), and the warehousing module within GCSS-MC. In addition to utilizing the warehousing module, 3051 Marines are now often being trained to transact receipts for incoming requisitions to reduce task breakup as supplies progress from the warehouse to the end using commodity. Also, 3051 Marines must use Web Federal Logistics Information System (WebFLIS) to conduct technical research during the conduct of their duties, just like 3043 Marines. 3051 Marines must also learn to how to use web-based service systems such as DLA Disposition Services (DLADS).<sup>39</sup> The

technical demands placed on the 3051 have grown in the last ten years, and will likely increase as Marine Corps supply systems are modernized.

Second, the Marine Corps must consider doing away with its “up or out” promotion policy for all Marines. In his guidance concerning talent management, General Berger states that the Corps must seek ways to retain high performing individuals while culling out low performers.<sup>40</sup> Removing “up or out” is an improvement in this regard. As pointed out in some other criticisms of the policy, it makes the assumption that every service member must be groomed for leadership and fails to distinguish those who excel at leading and managing from those who excel at the work itself.<sup>41</sup> Because of this, the Corps loses a number of highly qualified workers who are valuable at the tactical work level but not necessarily interested in or capable of advancing to a leadership position. If retaining talent is an essential goal, the Corps must consider the retention of highly qualified Marines who may not wish to rise through the ranks. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 has already established the authority for services to grant case-by-case approval for commissioned officers to decline consideration for promotion in favor of certain assignments or educational opportunities if it is deemed to be “in the best interest of the military department concerned,”<sup>42</sup> acknowledging that there are cases where talent retention and development outweigh the need to adhere to a regular promotion schedule. It seems presumptuous to recognize this need within the officer ranks and not consider that the same requirement may exist in the enlisted ranks where the overwhelming majority of the technical labor is performed.

Of course, eliminating “up or out” presents the Marine Corps with new risks and vulnerabilities that it must be protected against. These have been considered, and the following mitigating measures are offered. First, retention without promotion cannot become the preferred

career path for poor performers. Without regulation, Marines who know they cannot advance will choose to stay in their current rank and “coast” through their career while stagnating the introduction of new talent. In order to prevent this, the Marine Corps should establish a minimum cumulative Proficiency and Conduct grade to be considered for retention without promotion. Additionally, the Marine Corps should establish a competitive board that only retains a certain number of applicants. This number should be formulated in balance with recruiting goals for the year. In short, only high performing individuals should be considered for retention without promotion.

Another concern with this concept is the potential dearth of Marines advancing to leadership positions in favor of staying at a lower rank or less challenging billet. Even worse, this dearth could lead to a leadership vacuum in which less qualified individuals could advance, ultimately weakening the senior enlisted ranks of the Supply Community. In order to protect against this possibility, the Marine Corps should ensure that its model for incentives attracts high performing Marines. There are already inherent incentives such as the increase in base pay and access to more spacious base housing. In addition to that, Marine Corps culture should emphasize the benefits of climbing through progressively higher peer groups. For example, the Marine Corps may want to focus on revitalization of group-appropriate clubs (i.e. NCO, SNCO, and Officer clubs) by modernizing these facilities and offering a wider array of events.

The final concern is that Marines who decline to advance in rank but continue to gain time in service may view themselves as senior to Marines that actually outrank them based on their time in service. Having older Marines of junior rank in a work section presents the risk of insubordination by such Marines. The idea of junior ranking Marines routinely questioning or potentially defying senior Marines who have less experience is a risk, but it is one that can be

mitigated through attentive leadership and due diligence in the selection of Marines to be retained.

Attentive leadership entails senior Marines balancing the authority they wield with the experience of the Marines in their charge. This is a hardly a new concept, as every new lieutenant must navigate this balancing act during their first tour. In this relationship, the lieutenant is the authoritative figure within his/her platoon and leads a staff that consists of Marines with as many as 12 or more years of experience (unless said lieutenant is prior-enlisted). Here, the lieutenant learns to be mindful of and receptive to the experience of the subordinate Marines while still maintaining the responsibility and authority to make decisions in the planning and execution of unit tasks. In short, it has already been established within the Marine Corps model of leadership that an experience gap between subordinate and senior Marines is not an issue if the senior Marine can lead competently. As for due diligence in retention selection, Marines selected for retention without promotion should still be highly qualified Marines, as mentioned in the discussion concerning culling out the low-performing Marines who seek to coast through their careers. If the Marine Corps appropriately screens these Marines by any of the suggested means in this paper, the odds of retaining a Marine who will cause disciplinary problems in the future will be minimized.

### **Conclusion**

The Marine Corps must reevaluate its concepts for basic supply support in order to support the concepts for future war envisioned by General Berger in the *CPG*. The changes to the global operating environment have created challenges to the way the Marine Corps fights that have led to innovative concepts for future war. In turn, these concepts have created their own

challenges for sustaining a warfighting effort and have resulted in new guidance from DC, I&L on the future of logistics operations.

As a function of logistics, the Supply Community does not currently have the capability to address the lines of effort identified in *Sustaining the Force* in order to support the concepts outlined in the *CPG*. Supply personnel are not sufficiently educated on the Navy's logistics capabilities, nor do they receive realistic evaluated training that requires them to demonstrate proficiency in integrated supply execution. The Marine Corps is also still clinging to a hodgepodge of outdated systems, seemingly out of reluctance to fully invest in GCSS-MC which has proven to be an unviable solution for conducting supply operations in a deployed environment. Lastly, the current MOS configuration for the Supply Community, combined with current force structure management policy, degrades supply support capability due to the constant turnover of personnel within battalion-level consumer accounts and the inability to retain highly proficient individuals in technical billets. These shortfalls deprive the Supply Community of responsiveness, simplicity, and flexibility, three of the seven principles of efficient logistics support.

The Supply Community must address these issues in order to achieve alignment with the *CPG* and *Sustaining the Force*. PME for supply personnel must be remodeled to reflect the emphasis on naval integration that the Commandant desires. This means sending more Marines to Navy schools, integrating Navy supply personnel or units into Marine Corps training and education when possible, and creating training venues for logistics units that require Marines to exercise joint knowledge. The Marine Corps must also find a definitive way ahead for its future supply system. Whether GCSS-MC is retained or not, the Marine Corps requires a system that can be operated in an austere, potentially C2 degraded environment. And finally, the Marine

Corps must reevaluate its model for force structure within the Supply Community and the Marine Corps as a whole. Technology and manpower limitations have rendered the distinction between 3043 and 3051 Marines obsolete, with the only meaningful difference between the two MOSs being promotion time. Also, the Marine Corps needs to consider doing away with the “up or out” advancement policy if it wishes to retain and build institutional knowledge within the more laborious tiers of the Supply Community.

As the Marine Corps aims to become a more lethal and survivable force, it must also invest in its ability to sustain such a force. Effective supply support will be essential to sustaining combat power and tempo in the future operating environment, and the Supply Community must evolve to ensure that it is up for the task.

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<sup>1</sup> David Berger, *Commandant’s Planning Guidance: 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps*, July 17, 2019, 2.

<sup>2</sup> United States House of Representatives, “Title 10 – Armed Forces: United States Marine Corps: Composition; Functions, 10 U.S.C. § 5063,” accessed 28 December, 2019, <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title10&edition=prelim>.

<sup>3</sup> United States House of Representatives, “Title 10 – Armed Forces: United States Marine Corps: Composition; Functions, 10 U.S.C. § 5063. David Berger, *Commandant’s Planning Guidance*, 9-12. US Title 10 lists the primary responsibilities of the Marine Corps: (1) the seizure or defense of advanced naval bases and for the conduct of such land operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign, (2) develop, in coordination with the Army and the Air Force, those phases of amphibious operations that pertain to the tactics, technique, and equipment used by landing forces, (3) such other duties as the President or Department of Defense may direct. General Berger emphasizes concepts such as composite warfare, stand-in forces, distributed operations, and expeditionary advanced basing operations as ways to fulfill responsibilities (1) and (2) listed in US Title 10.

<sup>4</sup> United States House of Representatives, “Title 10 – Armed Forces: United States Marine Corps: Composition; Functions, 10 U.S.C. § 5063.”

<sup>5</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of The United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC, 2018), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Max Boot, “The Guerilla Myth,” *The Wall Street Journal*, accessed February 28, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323596204578243702404190338>.

<sup>7</sup> John Vrolyk, “Insurgency, Not War, is China’s Most Likely Course of Action,” *War on the Rocks*, December 19, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/12/insurgency-not-war-is-chinas-most-likely-course-of-action>.

<sup>8</sup> Colin Gray, “The 21st Century Security Environment and the Future of War,” *Parameters* (Army War College, Winter 2008-2009), 23-24.

<sup>9</sup> Frank Hoffman, “On Not-So-New Warfare: Political Warfare vs Hybrid Threats,” *War on the Rocks*, July 28, 2014, <https://warontherocks.com/2014/07/on-not-so-new-warfare-political-warfare-vs-hybrid-threats>.

<sup>10</sup> Diego Ruiz Palmer, “Back to the Future? Russia’s Hybrid Warfare, Revolutions in Military Affairs, and Cold War Comparison,” NATO Research Paper (Rome: Research Division, NATO Defense College, October 2015), 1-2. Michael Kofman, “Russian Hybrid Warfare and Other Dark Art,” *War on the Rocks*, March 11, 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/03/russian-hybrid-warfare-and-other-dark-arts>.

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- <sup>11</sup> David Berger, *Commandant's Planning Guidance*, 1. Michael Hoffman, "Russian Hybrid Warfare and Other Dark Art," *War on the Rocks*, March 11, 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/03/russian-hybrid-warfare-and-other-dark-arts>.
- <sup>12</sup> Deputy Commandant, Installations and Logistics, *Sustaining the Force in the 21st Century: a Functional Concept for Future Installations and Logistics Development*, (Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, May 12, 2019), 5.
- <sup>13</sup> DC, I&L, *Sustaining the Force*, 5.
- <sup>14</sup> Headquarters, US Marine Corps, *Logistics Operations*, MCWP 3-40, 2 May 2016, 1-7. The functions of supply are requirements determination, procurement, distribution, disposal, storage, or salvage.
- <sup>15</sup> David Berger, *Commandant's Planning Guidance*, 2, 7.
- <sup>16</sup> HQMC, *Logistics Operations*, 1-5 - 1-6. The seven principles are responsiveness, simplicity, flexibility, economy, sustainability, attainability, and survivability.
- <sup>17</sup> DC, I&L, *Sustaining the Force*, 6.
- <sup>18</sup> Priority Movement Office, "PMO Prime," accessed January 22, 2020, <https://pmohq.dc3n.navy.mil/PRIME.aspx>. (requires DoD Common Access Card).
- <sup>19</sup> David Berger, *Commandant's Planning Guidance*, 8.
- <sup>20</sup> Headquarters, US Marine Corps, *Logistics*, MCDP 4 (Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, February 21, 1997), 23.
- <sup>21</sup> Marine OnLine, "Rank/MOS Report," accessed 10 January 2020, <https://mol.tfs.usmc.mil/mol/indview/RankMosView.do>.
- <sup>22</sup> David Berger, *Commandant's Planning Guidance*, 17.
- <sup>23</sup> DC, I&L, *Sustaining the Force*, 6.
- <sup>24</sup> HQMC, *MCDP 4*, 113.
- <sup>25</sup> HQMC, *MCDP 4*, 22.
- <sup>26</sup> HQMC, *Logistics Operations*, 1-6.
- <sup>27</sup> Deputy Commandant, Installations and Logistics (LPC-5), *Birth of Military Equipment*, Naval Message (Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, October 30, 2018), 4.
- <sup>28</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps, *Ground Supply Training And Readiness Manual*, NAVMC 3500.64C, March 29, 2017, 8-6.
- <sup>29</sup> Foster Ferguson, Zachary Pagan, Zachary Embers, "Future Logistics Challenges (COA Dev)," *Marine Corps Gazette*, March 2019, WE15-WE16.
- <sup>30</sup> David Berger, *Commandant's Planning Guidance*, 14.
- <sup>31</sup> HQMC, *MCDP 4*, 100.
- <sup>32</sup> HQMC, *MCDP 4*, 102.
- <sup>33</sup> HQMC, *MCDP 4*, 102.
- <sup>34</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps, *Management of Property in the Possession of the Marine Corps*, MCO 4400.201 Ch 1, Volume 1, June 13, 2016, 2-8. At the battalion level, the Supply Officer often also inherits the billet of Fiscal/budget & Accounting Officer and is responsible for the budget formulation and execution.
- <sup>35</sup> CMC, MCO 4400.201, Volume 3, 1-17.
- <sup>36</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps, *Military Occupational Specialties Manual*, MCO 1200.17E, August 8, 2013, 3-342, <https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/MCO%201200.17E.pdf>.
- <sup>37</sup> CMC, MCO 1200.17E, 3-345.
- <sup>38</sup> CMC, MCO 1200.17E, 3-342, 3-345.
- <sup>39</sup> Timothy Hoyle, "Signs May Not Say DRMO Anymore, but Sites Still Have Same Great Service," Defense Logistics Agency, <https://www.dla.mil/AboutDLA/News/NewsArticleView/Article/1997157/signs-may-not-say-drmo-anymore-but-sites-still-have-same-great-service/>. Accessed December 19, 2019. DLADS was formerly known as Defense Reutilization Marketing Office (DRMO) until 2010.
- <sup>40</sup> David Berger, *Commandant's Planning Guidance*, 7.
- <sup>41</sup> Carl Forsling, "The 'Up-Or-Out' Promotion System Hurts the Military," *Task and Purpose*, October 19, 2016, <https://taskandpurpose.com/military-needs-abandon-promotion-boards>.
- <sup>42</sup> 115th Congress, *John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019*, August 13, 2018. Accessed September 18, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/5515>, 1,743.

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