

Getting a Bigger Bang for Our Buck: Reducing Training Costs for New Equipment

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Getting a Bigger Bang for Our Buck:
Reducing Training Costs for New Equipment

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Throughout the war in Iraq, the Marine Corps has been paying millions of dollars to outside contractors for training that Marines are just as, if not more capable of, providing. The contractors provide training on new equipment procured through the Urgent Universal Needs Statement (Urgent UNS) process. Firms contracted to provide training typically hire retired or recently separated armed forces personnel, train them on the new equipment, and deploy them to Iraq to train Marines in theater. While training on the various new equipment items is an absolute necessity, the high monetary costs, the excessive time required to carry out training execution, and the additional burdens placed on in-theater units receiving the training, are not. Contracted trainers for most Urgent UNS equipment should be replaced with a new equipment training team (NETT) cell staffed by active duty Marines.

Background: the Urgent UNS

As early as September of 2002, the defense acquisitions community was already busy preparing for the potential invasion of Iraq. Throughout the Marine Corps, commanders at all levels were identifying critical equipment shortfalls and establishing priorities for procurement. Numerous Universal Need Statements (UNS) began flowing from the Marine Expeditionary Forces (MEF) to Marine Corps Systems Command (MCSC) through Marine Corps

Combat Development Command (MCCDC) and Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC). By April of 2003, the requests to fill equipment and capability shortfalls were flowing at an ever-increasing rate. Each command involved realized that the traditional acquisition process was not meeting the needs of Marines on the ground in Iraq. The normal acquisition pipeline can take years or even decades to carry an idea from a universal need statement through initial capability development, testing, qualification, and finally to equipment fielding. A faster system was needed to support the Marines in the fight. As a result, the Marine Corps began utilizing an "Urgent" UNS process to expedite the flow of equipment and services from an initial request for a capability to delivery of that capability to the Marines in combat.

The Urgent UNS process shortens the regular approval procedure and eliminates most of the bureaucratic roadblocks that normally hinder a project officer from fielding equipment expeditiously. Most of the documentation and testing requirements are removed, and most of the legal constraints for contracting officers are eliminated. In short, once an Urgent UNS is approved, the only significant challenge to fielding the necessary equipment is finding the money to buy it. Unlike a normal acquisition program, congressionally approved funding is not a prerequisite for Urgent UNS equipment. Instead, the onus falls on MCSC to work with their financial analysts and analysts

from Defense Financial Management (DFM) offices to identify existing sources of funding from which money can be redirected. At times, these existing sources of funding are acquisition programs of record that have not met the Navy Comptroller (NAVCOMP) published obligation and expenditure rate for the fiscal year.

Current Situation

Most of the new equipment being fielded through the Urgent UNS process is technologically advanced and requires some level of training in order for Marines to employ the equipment properly. Additionally, equipment acquired through the Urgent UNS process is typically new to the Marine Corps, so there is no existing resident expertise. As a result, MCSC must frequently outsource from civilian contractors to train Marines on the equipment. The Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM) who build the equipment do not normally specialize in the development of training packages, nor do they regularly employ trainers for the equipment.¹ Additionally, in cases in which the company does have trainers, those trainers are frequently unwilling to deploy to a combat environment. As a result, the OEMs often contract trainers from a second company. The companies that have trainers for hire typically employ former soldiers or Marines.

¹ Gordon, Robert S., Major, USMC. Project Officer for Mobility/Counter-Mobility programs, Marine Corps Systems Command, Quantico, VA. Interview by the author, 14 December 2005.

These companies specializing in training send their former armed forces contractors to the OEM for training on the equipment prior to deploying to Iraq. In conjunction with or after completing technical training, these contractors must complete pre-deployment physicals and then travel to Camp Pendleton or another location for several days of pre-deployment training and gear/identification card issue. Upon completion of that evolution, they then travel to Iraq to meet with a liaison party, transit to the training location, conduct training, and finally, retrograde. While this process does accomplish the mission, it adversely impacts the Marine Corps in three ways: cost, time, and burden of coordination/force protection.

Cost

The cost for each civilian contractor varies depending on the situation. It is not uncommon for the Marine Corps to pay up to \$20,000 per week for one trainer and training materials in the Continental United States (CONUS).² This cost increases significantly for training outside the Continental United States (OCONUS) and is exacerbated further in hostile fire areas. For training in Iraq, the cost could vary from \$100,000 for one week of training to \$1.5 million to keep two or three

²Clarkson, Craig M., Captain, USMC. The author served at Marine Corps Systems Command, Quantico, VA as Project Officer for several Mobility/Counter-Mobility and Counter IED programs from May 2003 through December 2004

trainers/technical representatives in theater for a full year.

These contract costs typically include the following³:

- Paying the trainer (high rates for compensation in hostile fire areas)
- Supplemental (war zone) life insurance premiums for the trainer (up to \$20,000 for one week)
- General and administrative (G&A) fees, overhead fees, special equipment (i.e. satellite phones, cell phones, and computers at a amortized rate)
- Profit (varies, but generally up to six percent of total contract cost)
- Training costs (for the OEM to train the trainers)
- Cost of training materials and their distribution
- Airline tickets to all locations (including pre-deployment training and OEM training)
- Rental cars
- Pre-deployment physicals and any necessary medications
- Per diem (may include travel/vacation funds for rest and relaxation if the training period is more than one month)

³ Carroll, George T. Major, USMC. Contracting Officer for Ground Transportation and Engineer Systems Directorate, Marine Corps Systems Command, Quantico, VA. Interview by the author, 14 December 2005.

Moreover, there is a cost beyond the contracted training fees. The acquisition program of record that is stripped of funding to pay for the Urgent UNS equipment and associated training suffers. That program may be delayed or experience a set back in development as a result. Eliminating or reducing the need for training contractors would reduce the cost to the Marine Corps significantly.

Time

The contracting process takes time. Once the OEM and equipment delivery schedule is identified, the OEM begins searching for a company that can provide training. Numerous coordination meetings between the Marine Corps, the OEM, and the training company occur to identify requirements and responsibilities of all parties. Finally, the OEM conducts its own contracting with the training company, and then the OEM and Marine Corps negotiate the final particulars of the contract. Upon signing the contract, the process of moving the contractors through their equipment training, pre-deployment training, and deployment begins. Once in theater, the civilian contractors are met by a Marine liaison and they are routed to the training location via whatever transportation is available. Upon arriving at the training location, the receiving Marine unit is responsible for feeding, housing, and more importantly, protecting the contractors. The time and coordination necessary

to contract for trainers, move those contracted trainers through the pre-deployment process and into Iraq, transport them around Iraq, and provide force protection for them is a significant burden. All of the commands involved lose valuable man-hours and resources coordinating all of the extemporaneous requirements involved with moving a civilian in and out of a war zone. It would be far easier and less time intensive to eliminate or reduce the need for contracted trainers altogether. Instead, sending active duty Marines to the OEM for training and then deploying them to train other Marines in Iraq would be faster, more cost effective, and far less complicated for the project officer, government contracting officer, and receiving Marine unit alike. Ultimately, this process would save time, money, and reduce the burden of all involved with the Urgent UNS process.

Solution

The best way to train Marines on new equipment is by sending other Marines to train them. Instead of paying the immense fees for contracted trainers, the cost for Marines tasked as trainers would be limited to airline tickets and per diem. Aside from saving time, cutting costs, and reducing burden, the Marine Corps retains the knowledge gained by the Marines sent to the OEM for training. The organization keeps this knowledge base within the Corps rather than losing it as

soon as the training contract expires. In addition, the credibility of the training is enhanced because of the inherent trust given to Marine trainers by other Marines.

Recently, the IED working group sent a small cadre of Marines to Iraq to train Marines on new counter IED equipment, and the effort proved successful.⁴ These Marines conducted the mission for a short duration and then returned to their parent units. While there was significant coordination involved in standing up this cadre, the cost was minimal compared to using civilian contractors for the same effort. This exercise demonstrates that Marines are capable of quickly learning new skills, deploying for a short time to Iraq, and imparting those skills on others. Using these Marines' success as a model could prove useful in the future when endeavoring to stand up a new NETT cell. However, while the concept may be promising, the most significant challenge is the limited availability of manpower in the Marine Corps.⁵

Not every new Urgent UNS system lends itself to quick study. There are some systems that are extremely technologically advanced and proper training will require the

⁴ Murgo, Joseph B., Major, USMC (Ret). Director of Counter IED Technology, Marine Corps Systems Command, Quantico, VA. Interview by the author, 14 December 2005.

⁵ Gordon, Robert S., Major, USMC. Project Officer for Mobility/Counter-Mobility programs, Marine Corps Systems Command, Quantico, VA. Interview by the author, 14 December 2005.

Augustine, Joseph F., Major, USMC (Ret). Mobility/Counter-Mobility Team Leader, Marine Corps Systems Command, Quantico, VA. Interview by the author, 15 December 2005.

expertise of a seasoned veteran of that equipment. However, some Urgent UNS systems/equipment that are passive protective measures are relatively simple and readily lend themselves to Marine-based training cells. Examples are armored/mine-resistant vehicles (Cougar/JERVVES) and some recently procured jamming electronics. A small group of Marines could be dedicated to start this effort. The new equipment training team (NETT) cell would consist of thirteen enlisted (Sgt and above) and one officer in charge (OIC) (1stLt/Capt) headquartered at MCSC. Their mission would be to coordinate with all project officers supporting Urgent UNS systems, receive CONUS training on those systems, and conduct all CONUS and OCONUS training in order to support the fielding of new Urgent UNS equipment. The cell size would vary depending on the number of Urgent UNS programs awaiting implementation. Project officers on TAD orders could augment any temporary shortfalls in manpower. The dollars saved on training can be reincorporated into funding equipment shortfalls.

While manpower and force structure constraints exist, the exorbitant fees the Marine Corps has been paying for training in hostile fire areas through civilian contractors needs to be addressed and corrected. The difficulties surrounding a realignment of personnel to stand up a NETT cell would be justified by the time and money saved.

Conclusion

There are limited resources available to procure the current and future weapons systems needed to support the Marines fighting in Iraq. Every effort must be made to use those resources in the most cost effective way possible. The Marine Corps cannot afford to outsource services or capabilities that can be provided more efficiently from within. A NETT cell is an effective means of cutting training costs and reducing the burden on units requesting and providing new equipment, while still enhancing the level of training provided to the warfighter.

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