


# **Culture, Training and the Marine Corps Combat Evaluation**

*By CPT Quenten C. Hare*



**AS** an artillery captain looking forward to battery command there is one big question that comes up for me daily, "Will I be able to prioritize training and individual Marine development over administrative tasks?" There is a way to accomplish this though and I see it occurring in three parts: 1) Building a culture of wanting to train for combat operations, 2) Changing the way the Marine Corps Artillery Battalion employs its batteries in support of division operations, and 3) Using the Regimental Artillery Training School through the Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation (MCCRE) as a proof source for training standard attainment.

### A Winning Culture



Building winning culture begins with remembering that every day is a tryout and only the top performers will play on game day. Marines and artillerymen alike joined to be challenged. As leaders we have every obligation to show them what success looks like then bring them to their human limits in an attempt to obtain that success. Marine Artillery is great at giving you all the tools you need to build a strong culture. Marines want three things, field time with their gun sections, a high number of rounds fired safely and a no fail mission that they continually take pride in accomplishing. Ground fighting on the gun line, drinking a beer at Fiddler's Green, sharing in the rum punch during St. Babs and taking a shot from the swab bucket all come from the three things Marines want. They want the field time to ground fight and take a shot from the swab

bucket. They want the feeling of continuously accomplishing a no fail mission ensuring that St. Babs has cause for celebrations. Ultimately, they want to put rounds on target because we earn our way to Fiddler's Green, first through the mud on Fort Sill and finally anywhere Field Artillery is fired. It's not hard to build a culture, we just need to prioritize the training we need with the things Redlegs want.

### The Battery and The Division

What if Field Artillery wasn't an infantry training aid? What if artillerymen went to the field to train for artillery training and readiness (T&Rs) and the division had a way to support an infantry T&R without reducing the effectiveness of a battery's training evolution? One of the hardest things to deal with is losing momentum in training by taking a training week off the training, exercise and employment plan (TEEP) to conduct a tactical air control party (TACP) or a unit deployment program (UDP) battalion's MCCRE. When I was last there 10th Marines' two battalions had set deployment cycles. If you were in the UDP battalion your battery would likely get a six month rotation to Japan. If you were in the Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) battalion you had a 1/4 chance of getting a MEU. Not great odds. Although the MEU is the historic Marine Corps deployment, going to a UDP battalion would ensure you experienced the full cycle of the Combat Arms Marine or Tuckman's team building cycle. Experiencing the full gamut of checking into a unit, conducting a work up, passing a MCCRE, deploying, redeploying home, executing a mess night and departing for a new battery or rising in



*Battery E in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.*



*The SNCOs and Officers of Battery E in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.*



billet in rank are paramount to a young Marines' development. So important that it's the heart of Gen. Neller's last birthday ball message (watch it again, in 12 years of Marine Corps birthday balls that one hit home the hardest for me). Not only does the UDP battalion ensure that you go through that cycle it potentially guarantees you go through it twice during your lieutenant time.

How does a TACP shoot or a UDP MCCRE affect each battalion? Unit deployment program batteries deploy to Japan to attach to 12th Marines, an artillery regiment. We owe it to United States Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) to send them the best trained artillerymen that we can. Losing a week of training to shoot 40 rounds at a TACP shoot or 25 rounds during an infantry battalion's UDP MCCRE is not time well spent. Likewise these events take from the MEU battery's ability to detach from their parent unit early and attach to the Battalion Landing Team (BLT) as soon as possible. During both of those events you can view artillery as a training aid to someone else. Doing the math, rounds fired divided by time allotted likely equals a low return on a training investment.

So what? There are likely two batteries in the MEU battalion with little on their TEEP besides Rolling Thunder, the biannual regimental firing exercise. Take one battery and for 12 calendar months assign it as the division training aid. That battery wasn't deploying anyway and they still need to fire rounds to stay proficient. Allot them a significant amount of the ammo for the year for battery level training and encourage that battery commander get after it but their primary mission is accurate, effective and reliable fires in support of TACP, independent battalion MCCREs and any artillery mission taking from the pre-deployment training (PTP) Those Marines may not be able to take pride in the fact that they're going to be the pointed edge of the spear for a year but they can take ownership of what artillerymen take pride in. Field time with their gun sections, a high number of rounds fired safely and a no fail mission that they continually

take pride in accomplishing.

## Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation

The Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation is one of the Marine Corps' best tools for training standard attainment evaluation. It absolutely is and I believe that. 2ndLt Hare reported to Battery E, 2nd Battalion 10th Marines right after it was slated to attach to Battalion Landing Team 1/8. We experienced one MCCRE before we attached to 1/8 and that was the 10th Marines Artillery Training School MCCRE and the revitalized professionalism of the evaluation had just begun. Under the direction of the Regiment Field Artillery Chief, MGySgt a former Battery Gunnery Sergeant of E/2/10, he took the MCCRE from its previous check in the box to a high stress evaluation that took Marines to the edge of their artillery knowledge and challenged their ability to overcome human factors. If you've ever been a part of 10th Marines in Camp Lejeune you know what it's like to throw rounds in the breach, security patrols and dig the crew serves in while covered in the newest worst heat rash you've ever had. The MCCRE did two things for the battery, 1) it tested our ability to fight like artillery and meet T&R standards and 2) it solidified an important piece of Marine Corps and Field Artillery culture.

The MCCRE is, and should be, the regiment's last opportunity to ensure Marines are training to the required standard. 10th Marines did this at gunpoint. The influential comment our battery commander made to the officers of the battery before we pulled out of the motor pool was "We've trained the Marines hard and they're ready for this. They will knock it out of the park or 2/10 will find new officers that will train them to." I'm sure there are many ways to take that comment. In the warrior culture we all find ourselves in, I believe the appropriate way is as a reminder that everyday is a tryout and only the top performers will play on game day. Looking back I am confident the battalion commander would not have relieved





all his officers if we failed. I don't think. Either way we burned the ships and walked into the MCCRE as if we were going to combat. After we completed the MCCRE MGySgt told the battery how we fared. The cheers from the dirt mired faces of the Marines were deafening. Hearing from a Battery E alumni that he'd go to combat with us was all we needed to hear before detaching from 2/10 and attaching to 1/8.

Unfortunately the infantry and artillery can have a strained relationship from time to time. Checking into 1/8 after its MCCRE put us in the same position we would have put any Marine that joined our battery after our MCCRE. "You missed the hard part," or something to that effect would likely echo through the barracks. I don't have the perfect answer to mending that relationship. I do see the value in shared experiences and that experience comes in joining 1/8 earlier in the pre-deployment training pipeline. If the MCCRE is going to evaluate the overall combat effectiveness of the battalion they have all of the assets that will be available to you on the MEU actively employed on the infantry MCCRE may begin to bridge that gap. I'd venture to say that the bedrock of combat operations is trust and confidence. That needs to develop significantly earlier than at the gates. If the first BLT event occurs five weeks before your first at sea time the new battalion commander likely hasn't developed much trust in the ability and fidelity of the newly attached battery.

### **Rounds Complete**

The firing battery and every level of leadership above it all agree that training for Large-Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) is the goal. Training for combat operations during peacetime is a combination of resource allocation and culture. Marines need to be bought into the training and battery level leaders own that mission. Resource allocation is a cooperative mission owned by higher level leaders and the battery, with time being one of our greatest assets.

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## **Legacy Propellant Refresher Video**



Available for download on the Fires Knowledge Network (FKN) and Unit Training Assistance Program (UTAP/account required) at the QR codes below or copy and paste the link in your browser.



**FKN**

<https://armyeitaas.sharepoint-mil.us/f:/r/sites/TR-FCoE-Reach-back/Repository/Field%20Artillery/Commandant%20Approved%20Training%20Videos?csf=1&web=1&e=edpT9Z>



**UTAP**

<https://www.milsuite.mil/video/watch/video/67440>

CAC required for both websites.