

The MSSLG

A hybrid LCE for the future

by Maj Russell W. Parker

The current MLG structure for the MEF is failing to maintain the personnel and equipment readiness necessary to support future Marine Corps operations. The MLG has been effective for the past two decades during both wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Those wars have since ended and so has the operational commitment, including the applicability of the current MLG structure. The MLG is not capable of sustaining the current Theatre Security Cooperation, Special Purpose MAGTFs (SPMAGTF) missions, MEU deployments, or garrison operations without a great risk to readiness, personnel management, and the success of the MAGTF. BGen Ottignon and Maj Jordan recognize this failure of the current MLG structure in their *Gazette* article “More Tooth, Less Tail,” “Force structure decisions over the last 25 years have resulted in a Logistics Combat Element (LCE) with less capacity to meet the needs of an evolving MAGTF.”¹ These demands of the evolving MAGTF require an LCE that has a hybrid of Force Service Support Group (FSSG) functionally aligned battalions capable of supporting the current MLG designed combat logistics battalions.

Throughout Operations IRAQI and ENDURING FREEDOM, the MAGTF operated as a MEF with offset deployments between the corresponding units. This MEF construct inevitably brought about the MLG structure that was more effective than the FSSG that was in operation at the onset of the wars. The intent behind a multi-functional Combat Logistics Battalion (CLB) in a direct support (DS) role to an infantry regiment (RCT) was highly effective. However, it was critically flawed with deployment cycles as a CLB deploys for seven months and RCT's for one

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year. This in turn means that designated command relationships have not lined up across all MEFs with the employment in CLBs providing DS support to their associated RCT while in combat.

Throughout the past few years, the argument has been made to either keep the MLG in its current structure with minor adjustments or to return to the pre-war FSSG structure. Most notably are the *Gazette* articles by the officers of CLB-2, LtCol Spangenberg, and Capt Patton. In “Functionally Aligned Battalions,” the Marines of CLB-2 discuss the MLG returning to functionally aligned units since “[t]he original intent behind the multifunctional CLB's has diminished with constant restructuring efforts.”² LtCol Spangenberg, in response to the CLB-2 officers, argues that although functionally aligned battalions could be effective, the command and control of the current multifunctional CLBs are required to meet the demands of an effective fighting force.³ All authors argue toward the issues in the structuring of the MLG failing to meet the requirement of the future MLG. Specifically, the authors are not meeting the requirements to support a MEF with dispersed and disaggregated forces that can rapidly concentrate while being responsive to the smaller size elements that could be required by SPMAGTF elements.⁴ Capt Patton states,

We need to develop a structure, a mission, and a training cycle that

builds experience and understanding throughout our community in this critical facet of our jobs so that we can improve our ability to provide the right force, in the right place, at the right time.⁵

She refers to CLBs that are multifunctional and capable of meeting current mission essential tasks associated to current CLBs but, again, does not address how to meet future structural requirements. This article will propose a structure that meets the above requirements and demands by all three authors with functionally aligned battalions that feed into a command and control element capable of providing the right force, at the right place, and at the right time.

The current problems with the MLG are the degradation of equipment and the morale of the Marines from overuse in supporting exercises and operations around the globe. With MEU and SPMAGTF equipment density lists (EDL), there is a constant demand to task organize to a non-standard mission. This requires our forces to piece-meal themselves to further develop the proper force for the mission. Within the MLG, many Marines are pulled out of the DS combat logistics regiment (CLR) and general support CLR pool. The taskers the DS CLR are requested to fulfill extend past the DS role to division, negating its doctrinal mission.

This issue within the DS CLR is the reason why there are personnel issues within the MLG as well. Marines on both the enlisted and officer sides are getting tasked out individually to support various missions, which breaks unit cohesion and continuity amongst staff. This results in platoons without platoon commanders, company commanders who are junior first lieutenants, chief warrant officers serving as commanders instead of subject matter experts,

battalion and above staffs without key billets, and individual units incapable of meeting daily mission requirements without assistance from other units. The process of robbing Peter to pay Paul just to meet manning requirements is the driving issue for low morale being at the junior Marine and officer level.

The same issue encompasses equipment within the MLG. Good equipment gets passed around in support of mission taskings that do not always follow the personnel from the unit being tasked. This results in units providing their best equipment to support others while left with degraded and dead-lined equipment to operate their internal missions. In addition to the personnel taskers taking away the best and brightest to support multiple exercises, there is a lack of knowledge and ability of maintenance shops to keep up with the flow of equipment in maintenance. This degrades maintenance for equipment, morale for Marines, and ultimately readiness of the force.

The proposed way to correct these deficiencies in the MLG is to move away from the multifunctional DS CLR structure to a structure with a mixture of functionally aligned battalions and combat logistics battalions. The combat logistics battalions would not appear like the current structure but would only maintain the command and control function they currently possess. Instead of concentrating on table of organization and equipment, the CLB's would primarily use manning documents and EDLs. Overall, the structure and relationships between units needs to change internally within the LCE.

The top priority to form the Marine Service Support Logistics Group (MSSLG) would be to drop CLR-2 and CLR-25 and make transportation support battalion (TSB), landing support battalion (LSB), engineer support battalion (ESB), maintenance battalion, supply battalion, dental battalion, and medical battalion. All these independent battalions would fall directly under the MSSLG. There will also be a need to implement a headquarters battalion (similar to that of division).

Next is a need to drop all DS CLB's and consolidate the equipment under

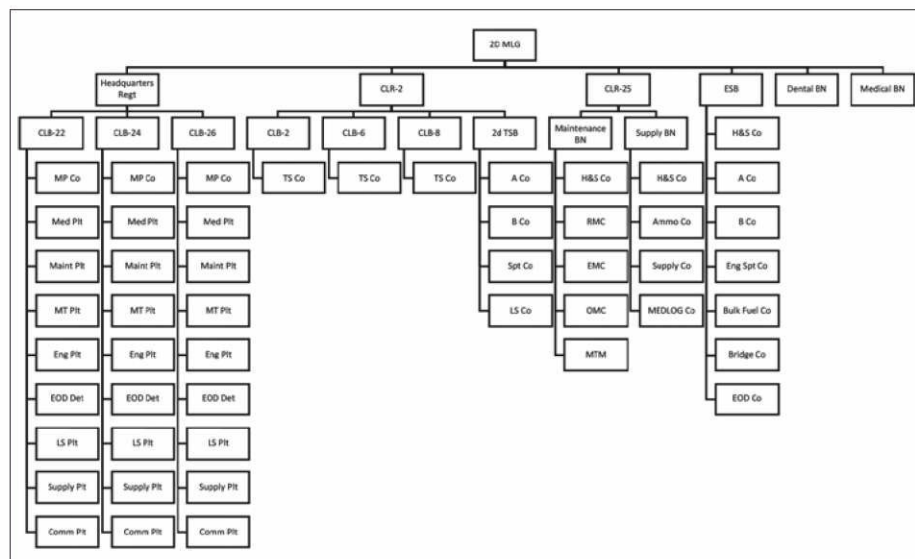


Figure 1. Current MLG Structure within 2d MLG.

TSB, LSB, ESB, maintenance battalion, and supply battalion; thus, there would be CLBs with a minimal table of equipment associated under a support regiment. These CLBs would have a bare minimum table of organization staff to include a battalion commander, executive officer, operations officer, adjutant, intelligence officer, logistics officer, and communication officer with associated officers/enlisted personnel (H&S Co).

The need for this would allow the LCE to have MOS experience within the functional battalions. The consolidation of all equipment and personnel allows for a unit to be dedicated

to specific requirements, developments in the occupational field, and training for Marines. Putting all the equipment in one chain of command allows for accountability and maintenance to be consolidated for maximum effort by that single battalion commander. These independent battalions would be primarily non-deployable elements.

The support regiment becomes the new *main effort* of the MSSLG. The battalions within this regiment would have a Table of Organization of the necessary leadership for the battalion. The battalions then are tasked with a mission from the MSSLG for MEUs, SPMAGTFs,

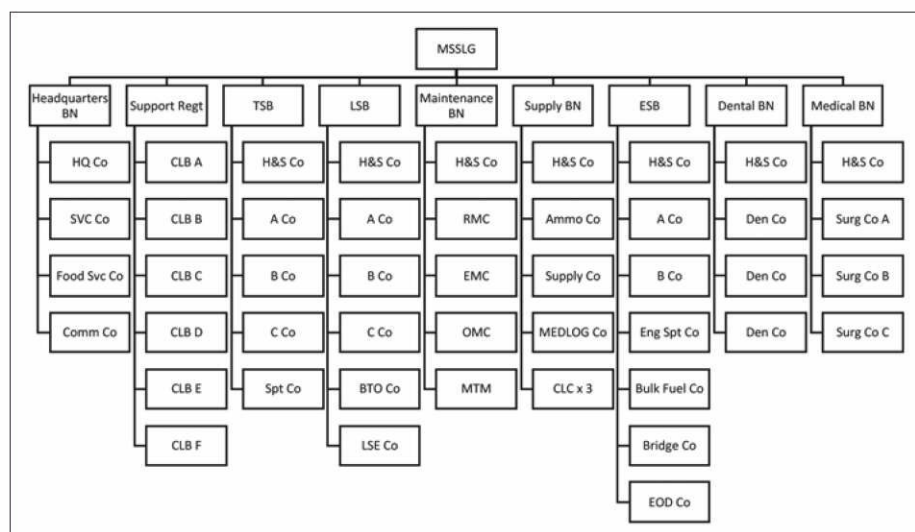


Figure 2. Marine Service Support Logistics Group (MSSLG) proposed structure.

small- and large-scale training exercises, and general support to the MEF. The battalions receive mission directives and then build a manning document and EDL in accordance with the mission. This allows a unit to become specifically tailored to a mission. Manning documents and EDLs would be fulfilled from the independent battalions with the best Marines to support them. As the personnel and equipment move from independent battalion to combat logistics battalion, they would move in full units (squads, platoons, or companies). The support regiment, with its CLB's, would also be the primary deployable unit within the MSSLG if a CLR structure were needed in support of a large-scale deployment such as Operations IRAQI and ENDURING FREEDOM.

It is the relationships that are established throughout the MSSLG that would become critical to the success of the organization. The independent battalions become feeders of equipment and personnel into the supporting battalions. This increases personnel and equipment accountability and maintenance readiness through a standardized support relationship between the functional battalions and the support regiment.

Personnel readiness would increase because of the authorized transfer of personnel from independent battalions to support CLBs and the return of personnel back to independent battalions. The CLBs will not transfer personnel between each other. This would solve an issue with sourcing personnel from across the MLG to conduct training and achieve mission essential training proficiency in garrison.⁷ Within the MSSLG structure, every Marine will have orders to a specific unit within the independent battalions (aside from the small staff associated to the support CLBs). When the Marine is tasked to a CLB, they receive temporary duty orders to the battalion for the length of the mission they are executing. Upon the return, the Marine receives any post deployment training/liberty necessary before the CLB is disaggregated back into the small staff, with Marines and equipment going back to a former

unit. The CLB is then put back into rotation for follow-on missions and the process is repeated. This brings structure to the tasking process and allows Marines a level of continuity as they move in platoons or companies from the independent battalion to support CLBs. Commanders would get fully functional units to train with instead of the current piece-meal process.

Equipment readiness would increase because of similar reasoning as personnel. As a platoon or company is tasked to support a CLB, they also take the associated equipment. This gives the Marines an incentive to keep it in quality condition. Also, like personnel, it prevents equipment being temporarily loaned to multiple units and operated by personnel who do not have the incentive to care for it. Also, this maintains a level of continuity when it comes to the maintenance cycle of the equipment. The mechanics that transfer the equipment (organizational maintenance) would provide historical knowledge on the individual equipment. Also, the transfer of information/maintenance continuity would be easily facilitated within Global Combat Support System-Marine Corps, when all the same players are involved.

Overall, a positive relationship between the independent battalions and the support CLB exists by the supported (CLBs) and supporting (independent battalions). The independent battalions are responsible for basic skills training, yearly requirements, and equipment readiness that feed into the support of CLBs. The Marine Corps would no longer need to piece-meal from separate units (which degrades morale and equipment survivability). Readiness would increase substantially as a result of continuity and a simplified transfer procedure being conducted. Marines and the institution would be better off and the ability to support would become highly effective and tailorable to current and future demands. This flexibility meets the Marine Corps demands and keeps the logisticians in the Marine Corps capable of maintaining a force sustained and prepared to win the Nation's wars.

The MLG is currently accomplishing the mission in support of the MAGTF,

but it is doing it at the peril of the Marines and equipment. This reactive approach is failing the institution as the Marine Corps constantly applies band-aids to the issues when putting together a task organized unit at the last minute.⁸ The Marine Corps needs a major overhaul of the structure that allows logisticians the ability to best support current missions while maintaining a high level of readiness for both personnel and equipment. No matter how much innovation and how many improvements are added to the force, it is null and void if there is a poor foundation. The proposed hybrid MSSLG structure is the best course of action to accomplish these tasks, maintain equipment readiness, personnel accountability, and prepare the Marine Corps for future endeavors.

Notes

1. BGen David A. Ottignon and Maj John D. Jordon, "More Tooth, Less Tail," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: October 2016).
2. Isabel Marin et al., "Functionally Aligned Battalions," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: October 2014).
3. Maj Kirk M. Spangenberg, "The Combat Logistics Battalion," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: June 2015).
4. "More Tooth, Less Tail."
5. Capt Tara Patton, "Train Like We Fight," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (October 2014), available at <https://www.mca-marines.org>.
6. Ibid.
7. "More Tooth, Less Tail."
8. "Train Like We Fight."



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