

Perspectives of Marines with prior advisor-related training

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This is the fourth of five planned “mini-reports” produced by the Center for Advanced Operational Culture’s (CAOCL’s) Translational Research Group (TRG). It is a product of a year-long research project¹ on the “Global Training and Advising Course,” which is offered by the Marine Corps Security Cooperation Group (MCSCG).

Mini-reports are intended to be narrow snapshots of the data leading up to the final research report. Because the researcher is in Quantico and the stakeholders at MCSCG are in Ft. Story, these mini-reports also generate discussion that is otherwise difficult to initiate due to the physical distance between the staffs.

Common acronyms (in alphabetical order): AO (Area of Operations); AD (Active Duty); ATC (Advisor Training Cell); ATG (Advisor Training Group, Twentynine Palms, CA); CAOCL (Center for Advanced Operational Culture); CERTEX (certification exercise); CLATT (Country Liaison Assessment and Training Team); EAP (Emergency Action Plan); FEX (field exercise); FSF (Foreign Security Forces); LOI (Letter of Instruction); MCSCG (Marine Security Cooperation Group); MEF (Marine Expeditionary Force); MTT (Military Transition Teams); OPSEC (Operational Security); PTP (Pre-deployment Training); SC (Security Cooperation); SERE (Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape); TIG (Training Instructor Group, part of MCSCG)

Security cooperation team names in this report: MARCENT 13.2 & MARCENT 14.1 (Marine Central Command, Jordan); UAE (United Arab Emirates); GLT (Georgia Liaison Team, Georgia); GTT (Georgia Training Team, Georgia); 3/8 (3rd Battalion, 8th Marines, various countries in Africa).

INTRODUCTION:

In 2013, CAOCL and MCSCG initiated a qualitative study with a stated research objective to “find out what cultural knowledge is useful or leads to mission success during deployment.”² To conduct this study, I observed classroom lessons in MCSCG’s “Global Training and Advising Course,” conducted semi-structured interviews with Marines (at MCSCG, while on deployment, and upon return from deployment), and had occasional written communication with Marines while on deployment. Toward the end of the data gathering phase of the research project, an officer in the TIG expressed an interest in perspectives from Marines who had received prior advisor-related training. In all, one quarter of the total number of Marines in this research project (24 of 100 interviewees) offered a comparison between their current training at MCSCG and another pre-deployment training. Seven Marines received prior training at MCSCG, so their perspectives were about how the MCSCG training evolved over time. Six Marines attended at the Advisor Training Center (based at the MEFs) and the Advisor Training Group, located in

¹ This research project is conducted under MCCDC Human Subjects Research – Protocol # MCCDC.2013.003-IR-EP7-A/CAOCL STUDY. This joint research project between CAOCL and MCSCG will provide an actionable assessment of how Marines who receive advisor skills training from MCSCG view its impact on how they approach mission planning and interacting with a foreign population. This is a non-conclusive interim report.

² IRB Research Protocol # MCCDC.2013.003, “Longitudinal Assessment of Security Cooperation Training, Culture Training and Mission Effectiveness.”

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Twentynine Palms (hereafter referred to as ATC/ATG).³ The feedback from these Marines may be of particular interest to MCSCG, as it has recently become the service enabling organization for Security Cooperation and Security Force Assistance (SC & SFA), which includes portions of training that once occurred at ATC/ATG. Eleven Marines reported that they had deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan on a MTT,⁴ but did not specifically say where they were trained. Overall, Marines believe that MCSCG training has improved over time, and it “breaks even” with other types of advisor training. If MCSCG wishes to expand on its training, it may want to leverage the scenarios (both classroom and field exercise) that were developed for ATC/ATG, as these scenarios tended to receive high praise from Marines. If MCSCG wishes to refine its training, it may adopt changes to the classroom instruction which address some Marine preferences. One or two Marines each mentioned these three potential improvements to MCSCG’s curriculum: leverage the experience of the individuals on their team (in addition to the instructors’ experience); take time in class to have critical discussions about mission-specific challenges and solutions; and ensure Marines know what training they will cover with foreign forces (and that they know the material themselves) throughout the training (rather than reserving this for the CERTEX).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND SOME LIMITATIONS:

The data for this report is taken from semi-structured interviews; and interviewees were chosen opportunistically. Most of the interviews were conducted during training breaks and over the lunch hour during classroom training at Ft. Story. However, I did observe MARCENT 13.2, MARCENT 14.1 and 3/8 during their three or five-day CERTEXs, which provided additional time for initial interviews, and sometimes a follow-up to a prior interview. The most in-depth interviews in this report are with the four Marines on MARCENT 13.2, whom I interviewed in Virginia (sometimes more than once), Jordan, and California.⁵ Refer to Table 1 below for a complete list of team names,⁶ the number of Marines I interviewed, and the total number of times prior advisor-related training was mentioned. The numbers differ because prior training was not a planned research question, thus this information is from Marines who voluntarily introduced the topic. There are also discrepancies due to the length of the interview. For UAE, GLT, and GTT a Marine’s feedback may be a sum total of three or four sentences, whereas a MARCENT 13.2 Marine may have described his prior training multiple times in great detail (as illustrated by the course described in Appendix A.) Table 2 below offers a quick glance of which Marines described which type of prior training.

MCSCG training can vary in length and content, from 23 days for a team going to Georgia (with no role player interactions), to three months for a team going to Jordan (with a five day field exercise involving dozens of role players). This impacts the feedback I received, since each team’s training schedule, the content of the training (whether or not it includes role player interactions), and the timing of my interviews during the training are all contextual considerations that impacted Marine feedback. The individual comments in this report are not necessarily representative of any larger population; however, stakeholders at MCSCG may glean information suited to their purposes.

³ According to a CNA report “United States Marine Corps Advisors: Past, Present and Future” (August 2013), advisor teams deploying to Afghanistan after 2007 completed the initial classroom instruction on advising at their resident MEF, which was followed by additional practical application and field exercises at the ATG in Twentynine Palms. Further details on this training can be found under “MCSCG to Other: Training breaks even.”

⁴ Except for one GySgt with the UAE team who deployed to Mongolia as a Camp Commandant.

⁵ The original intent of the research was to interview multiple teams over the course of their deployment, but time and budget constraints did not permit similar data gathering opportunities with other teams.

⁶ The team names used in this report are the commonly used names within MCSCG. To view full names and descriptions, please see the section at the beginning of the report titled “Security cooperation team names.”

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Table 1: Marine security cooperation teams represented in this report						
	MARCENT 13.2	UAE	GLT	GTT	3/8	MARCENT 14.1
Area of operations	Jordan	United Arab Emirates	Georgia	Georgia	Various - Africa	Jordan
Reservist/AD	Reservist	AD	AD	Reservist	AD	Reservist
Total # w/ prior deployments out of total # interviewed per team	10 / 16	18 / 23	7 ⁷ / 8	5 / 6	3 / 13	9 / 12
Total # statements about prior training	4	8	6	1	1	4
Role player interaction is part of training I observed?	Yes- CERTEX	No	No	No	Yes- CERTEX	Yes- in class and CERTEX

Table 2: Training comparison by team and training program							
	MARCENT 13.2	UAE	GLT	GTT	3/8	MARCENT 14.1	Total
MCSCG to MCSCG	4	0	0	0	0	3	7
MCSCG to ATC/ATG	0	1	3	0	1	1	6
MCSCG to other PTP training	0	7	3	1	0	0	11
TOTAL	4	8	6	1	1	4	24

COMPARISON OF TRAINING

Prior training fell into three categories: earlier MCSCG training; Afghanistan or Iraq-specific training with the ATC/ATG, or another type of PTP for a mission that involved partnering with FSF.⁸ Seven Reservists in this report said that MCSCG training package has either improved or continues to be satisfactory. According to the remaining 17 interviewees, (2 Reservist, 15 AD) MCSCG’s training tends to “break even” with any other advisor-related training. When it comes to specific training topics, four Marines preferred the language instruction at MCSCG over other training packages, while four considered MCSCG training

⁷ On a day when I interviewed both GLT and GTT Marines, I omitted the team of one interviewee. He could be either GLT or GTT. Since I collected no other personally identifiable information other than rank, per my research protocol, I have assigned him to the GLT using my best guess (based on other information in the interview.)

⁸ Because these Marines did not specifically mention ATC or ATG, I did not count them in that group, but it is possible some of these eleven interviewees were referring to ATC or ATG training as well.

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less effective because it did not include role player interaction or practical applications.⁹ Details of each comparison are below.

MCSCG to MCSCG: Training has improved

In the view of seven Marines, the MCSCG training package has either improved or continues to be satisfactory, but may become redundant if they return to MCSCG in the future. When I conducted interviews with them, they were deploying to Jordan on a MARCENT team (either 13.2 or 14.1). On prior deployments, three of these interviewees had been to Georgia, and four had been to Jordan.¹⁰ According to three of the seven, one area of steady improvement has been the field exercise that includes role players and mission-related practical exercises, known as the CERTEX. A MARCENT 13.2 SSgt said that his initial CERTEX training was “cheesy”¹¹ because the role players were Marines pretending to be Jordanian Army enlisted and officers. In subsequent CERTEXs, MCSCG hired contractors as role players, many of whom were foreign born and spoke a foreign language similar (or identical) to that spoken in the area of operations. By the time the MARCENT 13.2 SSgt went through his second CERTEX in June 2013, he was very impressed. His comments on the first day were, “This is spot on.[...] The role players are perfect, just like in Jordan.[...] This isn’t like it was two years ago when they had Intel PFCs¹² doing the roles.”¹³ Once he saw the role players and the more realistic surroundings, this SSgt felt he needed to modify his initial attitude toward the CERTEX, saying “we’re going to have to step up our game. We thought we could put sh*t down [on paper] and shoot from the hip.”¹⁴ In addition to the role players, the CERTEX included more realistic interactions with other relevant figures (e.g. briefs from a Security Cooperation Officer (SCO) at the embassy). These improvements not only impressed this SSgt, it changed his attitude toward his desire to perform well in the exercise. From this and other comments, such as one from a MARCENT 14.1 Lt, who said his experience in Jordan was “exactly like the CERTEX,”¹⁵ it is evident that the closer the training can imitate aspects of the actual environment and mission, the greater the approval from Marines.

MCSCG has also added “high speed”¹⁶ elements to its training package over time such as shooting, driving, combat life-saving and SERE instruction.¹⁷ Two Reservists said that it was rare to get such a comprehensive training package.¹⁸ MCSCG’s combination of lessons may be unique to Reservists because of their relatively limited time training in the field. A MARCENT 13.2 SSgt was especially

⁹ As has already been stated, each team’s training experience at MCSCG is different. In this report, only the MARCENT 14.1 worked with role players in the classroom in training conducted by the contractor Blue Canopy. MARCENT 13.2, MARCENT 14.1 and 3/8 engaged role players during their CERTEX exercise.

¹⁰ There were additional Marines on each team who also had prior deployments to either Georgia or Jordan, but they either did not mention their prior training or were not interviewed, and are not included in this report.

¹¹ SSgt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed June 6, 2013.

¹² SSgt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed June 29, 2013. The acronym stands for Private First Class (PFC) Marines with a career specialty in Intelligence.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ SSgt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed June 29, 2013.

¹⁵ Lt, MARCENT 14.1, interviewed Nov. 14, 2013.

¹⁶ SSgt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed Feb. 19, 2014.

¹⁷ Typically, the SERE course was praised by Marines. However, one MARCENT 13.2 SSgt, who had it twice, said the second course was less instructive because it was less challenging, “I wanted to be scared for my life. Last time, we were handcuffed and thrown in a trunk of a car in July. You talk about focus. Throw me in a trunk of a car with a hood over my head. That’s where focus comes in.” SSgt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed Feb. 18, 2014.

¹⁸ In addition to these 2 MARCENT 13.2 SSgts, an AD Sgt on the UAE team also described the MCSCG training as unique, “As an Amtraker [this is a] once in a lifetime experience.” Sgt, UAE, interviewed June 15, 2013.

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enthusiastic about the additions to the course. In contrast to his prior MCSCG training, which he said was disorganized, he said, “Now it’s like summer camp. We’re learning foreign weapons, driving, pistol carbine packages, SERE. I hope I don’t have to use all that over there, but it’s handy.”¹⁹ In contrast, for a MARCENT 13.2 Capt, the new hands-on elements of the training were fun, but they were not necessarily useful in accomplishing the mission. In an interview following his deployment to Jordan, the MARCENT 13.2 Capt said of the MCSCG training, “We got shooting and driving for Jordan. The driving was definitely good. The shooting wasn’t necessary for the mission.”²⁰ However, the Capt said other classroom lessons were relevant, such how to write a Letter of Instruction (LOI), and the Emergency Action Plan (EAP). It is unclear if these were newly added classes, but they are unique, according to the Capt: “You don’t get [this] anywhere else.”²¹ Regardless of exactly how relevant they are to the mission, the “high speed” courses tend to be positively received by these Marines, as are classroom lessons that are deemed to be mission-relevant.

Training organization and language instruction has also improved at MCSCG, according to four Marines. One SSgt appreciated the classroom training had “a little of everything every day.”²² A MARCENT 14.1 SSgt on his second deployment to Jordan said that the content was more closely aligned with the course expectations, saying:

I like the training, the way it’s being conducted a lot better. It’s evolved since I was with [MARCENT 13.1]. The course expectations are a lot clearer. There was a test we took last year, but it was not on material that we learned in class. It was found in the handouts, but we hadn’t gone over it.”²³

Two Marines said the language improved. One SSgt who had been to Georgia said this was because their training cycle was much longer (three months instead of thirty days). Another SSgt, on his second deployment to Jordan said the vocabulary was more relevant. He said, “This time we’re not learning a script like we did [before]. We can say things like ‘do you have chicken I can buy?’ It gives us a broader spectrum. It’s not just tactical.”²⁴ Though Marines offered some suggestions for improvement to language (teach the local dialect) and others preferred different content delivery (less “death by PowerPoint”), overall, their comments about the MCSCG training were generally positive.

This is good news for MCSCG. Between its launch as MCSCG in 2012²⁵ and the time these interviews were conducted (summer 2013), the training program appears to have matured. One reason for this is the gradual increase of institutional knowledge which the TIG has gained through experienced instructors or updates from deployed teams. The MCSCG CLATTs have also provided additional support, such as participating in the CERTEXs (e.g. playing the role of the aforementioned embassy SCO). However, as the training curriculum becomes more formalized,²⁶ there is one potential downside to consider. A total of nine Marines on the two MARCENT teams are known to have had prior training at MCSCG (two did not compare the MCSCG training, and others on the team may have had prior MCSCG training but did not

¹⁹ SSgt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed June 6, 2013.

²⁰ Capt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed Feb. 19, 2014.

²¹ Capt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed June 6, 2013.

²² SSgt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed June 6, 2013.

²³ SSgt, MARCENT 14.1, interviewed Dec. 18, 2013.

²⁴ SSgt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed June 6, 2013.

²⁵ Rosenau, W., McAdam, M., Katt, M., et al (2013). *United States Marine Corps Advisors: Past, Present and Future*. CNA Strategic Studies. Alexandria, VA.

²⁶ This formalization process will continue, especially as MCSCG begins to assign the Security Cooperation Free Military Occupational Specialty (FMOS) to enlisted and officers in the near future.

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mention it). Three Marines made comments that indicated there was a diminishing value in the MCSCG training. As one MARCENT 13.2 SSgt said, “The first time, the training [was] absolutely useful. But [now] there’s no way they could tell me something I don’t [already] know.”²⁷ This statement reads as overly confident, because every team and deployment will be different, and even the same lesson can yield new insights. However this sentiment does indicate a potential trend which may require additional planning by the TIG and the SC team leadership. If Reservists continue to deploy with the regularity they have in recent years,²⁸ and if several “seasoned veterans” are on the same team (whether their prior deployment is in the same or different country), strategies to challenge or involve them in the training process may be necessary. Perhaps TIG instructors can leverage “seasoned vet” expertise in the class discussion, or perhaps the “vets” can be given additional unit logistics or planning responsibilities outside of class that challenge them and make use of their experience as the rest of the team completes the classroom training for the first time.

MCSCG to Other: Training “breaks even”

Five AD Marines and one Reservist (prior AD) trained at both the ATC/ATG prior to deploying to Iraq or Afghanistan. According to a CNA Strategic Studies report about advising in the Marine Corps, the ATC instruction at the MEF addressed “combat and advising proficiencies,”²⁹ and the training in ATG in Twentynine Palms included language, culture and billet-specific training, along with an extensive field exercise involving “more than 250 Afghan-American role players.”³⁰ These advising missions, though part of ongoing combat operations, bear similarities to a standard SC mission, especially with respect to advising and training partner forces.

Of the six Marines who mentioned prior training at ATC/ATG, two Marines gave ATG high praise, with one SSgt describing ATG training as the “gold standard.”³¹ While he admitted he had only been at MCSCG for three days, the SSgt felt that the MCSCG instructors were not as knowledgeable as those at ATG, “Some [MCSCG instructors] are good, some are long-winded. It’s like they’re stretching the content to meet the time allotted.”³² A GySgt praised the depth of content he learned at ATG. He said MCSCG was “covering the basics” because “they don’t have time.” Whereas at ATG,

“We saw more videos, there were longer classes. We did role plays with Iraqis in the classroom, and with the interpreters. The interpreters went through the training too [...] they ate MREs and PT’d with us.”^{33 34}

²⁷ SSgt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed Feb. 18, 2014.

²⁸ The Reservist deployment rate has been due, in part, to the fact that AD Marines were involved in ongoing combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, leaving SC billets open to Reservists. Furthermore, Reservists often willingly volunteer and compete for SC missions as they provide career-advancing experience with an overseas deployment. AD Marines have also been deploying on SC missions, and will continue to do so, which could mean redundant training may become a problem for them as well. However, the larger population in AD, and the rate of attrition (especially among the enlisted) will likely result in less “repeat trainees.” This dynamic will be discussed further in the final research report.

²⁹ Rosenau, W., McAdam, M., Katt, M., et al (2013). *United States Marine Corps Advisors: Past, Present and Future*. (p. 77). Alexandria, VA: CNA Strategic Studies.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ SSgt, GLT, interviewed Aug. 14, 2013.

³² Ibid. The SSgt also mentioned that he may be overly critical because of his prior experience as a platform instructor at School of Infantry.

³³ Meals Ready to Eat (MRE) and physical training (PT)

³⁴ GySgt, 3/8, interviewed Oct. 9, 2013.

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This GySgt had not yet experienced the CERTEX (which was held at the conclusion of his training in November), but he anticipated that MCSCG's three-day field exercise would not compare to the three week exercise he had through ATG in Twentynine Palms. Overall, the GySgt felt ATG's robust training was difficult to repeat. "For me," he said, "it's like getting a big Christmas the year prior and the next year you get fewer presents."³⁵ This assessment is likely true. ATG's robust training depth and duration could be the result of the prioritization of the missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, and additional wartime funds dedicated to each. Also, ATG instructors are likely to have gained years of experience from multiple deployments in these areas. In contrast, MCSCG, is responsible for training teams with various missions that deploy to a wide range of countries (as indicated by the teams in this report, a subset of the total number trained each year), whose schedules overlap with one another, are inconsistent in duration and content, and are all executed in modest training facilities. Given these constraints, MCSCG cannot transform into ATC/ATG. However, MCSCG can appropriate training material from ATC/ATG going forward. Some of the scenarios and classroom curricula may "slot in" to the current advisor training material rather easily. Other aspects may require modifications, which may be worthwhile, if the instruction is as robust as these Marines feel it was.

A UAE Sgt said the training packages between ATG and MCSCG were similar, except for role players at ATG, which "helped a lot at the end of the day. With them, we learned about how you handle a situation."³⁶ (He did not experience role player interactions in class or in a CERTEX at MCSCG.) ATG conducted classroom scenarios with role players, which four Marines preferred. Meanwhile, MCSCG received greater praise for its training organization and language instruction, as well as for offering special courses (like SERE). One GLT Cpl said MCSCG was better organized, whereas ATC "had no schedule. It was sporadic in how it was put together."³⁷ A Capt³⁸ preferred MCSCG over ATG because it included SERE training and had better language instruction. A Sgt said MCSCG included more OPSEC training, which "is good, because we'll have lots of freedom [while deployed]."³⁹ According to these Marines, MCSCG has some added content and is better organized than ATC/ATG was, but ATG's inclusion of role players in classroom exercises received the most consistent praise when contrasted to MCSCG.

Among the eleven Marines (10 AD, 1 Reservist) who received PTP training prior to an MTT (most often to Iraq and Afghanistan, though one Marine went to Mongolia), the positive and negative feedback for MCSCG is also fairly balanced. A SSgt who deployed as an advisor to Iraq said his PTP included Iraqi role players and it was better than MCSCG's because "we had to come up with [our own] solutions" and "it was a more personable format; in a small group, it was better."⁴⁰ According to a GLT Sgt, his Afghanistan PTP was better because "it was more in depth [...] we listened to other situations and their solutions."⁴¹ One infantry SSgt⁴² who went to Iraq on an MTT said he had a six-week weapons course during his PTP, whereas he had no shooting package from MCSCG before deploying to UAE. These negatives are balanced out by other positives. MCSCG compared favorably in terms of language, where

³⁵ GySgt, 3/8, interviewed Oct. 9, 2013.

³⁶ Sgt, UAE, interviewed June 24, 2013.

³⁷ Cpl, GLT, interviewed Aug. 14, 2013.

³⁸ Capt, MARCENT 14.1, interviewed Dec.13, 2013.

³⁹ Sgt, UAE, interviewed June 24, 2013.

⁴⁰ SSgt, GLT, interviewed Aug. 14, 2013.

⁴¹ Sgt, GLT, interviewed Aug. 13, 2013.

⁴² SSgt, UAE, interviewed June 19, 2013.

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one UAE SSgt “got more”⁴³ Arabic than he did before a deployment to Iraq, and another Marine felt he got the right content. He said, “We need rapport building type of language. We got that this time. I needed that with I MEF.”⁴⁴ Another Marine said MCSCG’s Advisor Skills lessons would have helped before he went to Mongolia, because then “I would have been better prepared.”⁴⁵ A facial recognition class by the contractor Blue Canopy was familiar to two UAE Marines at MCSCG, since it was the same class they received as they were preparing to deploy to Afghanistan. Despite the repetition, one Sgt said that class “helps a lot...not just the facial profiling, but to tell if you’re getting frustrated and angry.”⁴⁶ According to this feedback, if Marines experience in-depth scenarios, and if the training (including the language training) is closely associated with what they anticipate performing downrange, they are likely to be satisfied with their training.

CONCLUSION:

This report reveals the types of training Marines prefer or recalled. When Marines did not interact with role players at MCSCG, the other training (either ATC/ATG or PTP) received greater praise. In general, whenever feasible, MCSCG should continue to include hands-on courses (as in SERE), role player interactions and scenarios in the classroom (as with Blue Canopy), and field exercises (as with the CERTEX). Marines tended to recall “in depth” lessons from their prior training (not MCSCG) that included guided discussion, critical thinking and problem solving. A few recalled specific training scenarios that challenged them to use observational skills. One remembered he “failed” in his PTP training scenario because “I didn’t pick up on things the interpreter was doing.”⁴⁷ Another described a money exchange role play at ATG where he “had to figure out something was fishy.”⁴⁸ Whether or not MCSCG training with role players is equally challenging is unclear. What is clear is that practical applications with a role player (which Blue Canopy and the CERTEX include), are beneficial and should be maintained.

Two Marines cautioned against MCSCG’s method of teaching, colloquially known as “death by PowerPoint,” and two felt that they were learning content at MCSCG that they had already learned at the MEF. However, there are some lessons that Marines felt were very helpful because they were consistent with the mission they were expected to fulfill. For instance, language and culture classes received some praise.⁴⁹ Four Marines preferred the language instruction at MCSCG because they had more time to learn it or they learned more appropriate vocabulary (social versus tactical). MCSCG’s culture classes are “unique”⁵⁰ and contain truthful information that is typically “off the record.”⁵¹ Reservists and other Marines may appreciate lessons with practical application (shooting and driving ranges, SERE, combat lifesaver, etc.), regardless of whether they expect to use these skills downrange, because they do not have as much time to learn and practice these sorts of “hard skills” in their standard training. When it comes to “soft skills” such as language, or use of planning tools, Marines may be critical of the content unless it is demonstrably related to the mission. Thus, OPSEC is well received by some because Marines tend to be more dispersed in advisor missions, and more highly integrated into the FSF structure,

⁴³ SSgt, UAE, interviewed June 15, 2013.

⁴⁴ MSgt, UAE, interviewed June 19, 2013.

⁴⁵ GySgt, UAE, interviewed Oct. 7, 2013.

⁴⁶ Sgt, UAE, interviewed June 24, 2013.

⁴⁷ SSgt, UAE, interviewed June 24, 2013.

⁴⁸ GySgt, 3/8, interviewed Oct. 9, 2013.

⁴⁹ A more in-depth analysis of the language curriculum is available in mini-report titled: “Analysis of Language Instruction in Advisor Training,” released Aug. 27, 2014.

⁵⁰ Lt, GLT, interviewed Aug. 14, 2013.

⁵¹ Capt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed June 6, 2013.

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where personal security and security of information are more likely to be compromised. The LOI and EAP are two other useful topics, and may not be in most standard training courses Marines receive. From the limited information available in these interviews, it is not possible to assess MCSCG's overall training effectiveness. However, this report does indicate that Marines retain and prefer hands-on learning methods, along with classroom content that can be applied downrange. If the MCSCG curriculum were to be augmented in the future, the ATG scenarios are a good starting point. If the current classroom information were to be refined in the future, then techniques that align the lesson to the mission (i.e. leveraging prior experience in team discussion, or assessing Marines on their ability to achieve specific mission-related tasks) are likely to be successful. MCSCG's curriculum has improved over time and is currently regarded to be as successful as other similar training programs Marines have experienced.

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APPENDIX A:

“GOOD TO GREAT”: A unique seminar for Marines deploying to Georgia, and what they valued⁵²

In this and other mini-reports, Marines have stated that they prefer to learn from practical application exercises (participatory learning) as opposed to PowerPoint (considered passive learning). But whether Marines actually learn, retain, and apply knowledge gained from the practical application method is another matter. And since it is impossible to “scientifically prove” the impact of an instructional method on mission success, it is difficult to know whether the benefits of practical application truly outweigh use of PowerPoint. While this report will not prove one instructional method is better, I can present the perspectives of three Marines who participated in a beta test of a course that utilized participatory learning methods, such as the case study method, to prepare Marines prior to deploying to Georgia. It is clear the training was memorable, and two Marines said it was helpful. Participatory methods, as employed in this beta test training, appear to have some limited positive impact on the Marines, and it may have had long-term impact, when combined with the deployment experience itself.

A year prior to the start of this research project, in June 2012, three Marines⁵³ in this report were among 56 Reservists who were about to deploy to Georgia. In addition to attending advisor training at MCSCG, these three Marines (a Capt, SSgt, and Sgt) also participated in a beta test of a “*Making Good Instructors Great*”™ course (also referred to as G2G, short for “good to great”) aboard Quantico Marine Corps Base. The 11-day beta course was designed by a contractor, MESH Solutions, in conjunction with TECOM, to achieve “instructional excellence,” as well as to model “expert coaching and mentoring, outstanding communication and feedback technique, and other leadership and character traits that are applicable to all facets of a Marine’s life.”⁵⁴ Exactly a year later, while training at MCSCG, two of the three Marines who took the G2G course explicitly mentioned it in interviews with me, and described their feelings about it on more than one occasion. Their comments offer a few insights about what they retained or applied (or did not apply) from this course, as well as the potential impact of such training over time.

One specific lesson that both the SSgt⁵⁵ and the Capt⁵⁶ described is a case study on the 2008 war between Georgia and Russia.⁵⁷ This case study on the “three day war” helped the Marines understand the national strategy, and the purpose of the Georgia Training Team. The SSgt said, “We got an understanding of oil, how the economy works, why it’s a big deal. We learned about the military and the culture.”⁵⁸ Later on, he described the impact of the class after arriving in Georgia, “You get there and see

⁵² If the TIG is interested, it ought to be possible for MCSCG to obtain the “*Making Good Instructors Great*” training curriculum, as it is owned (and presumably archived) by TECOM. The case study on the 2008 Georgia War is also available through MCU and Dr. Bruce Gudmondsson at the Case Method Center.

⁵³ All three were on the MARCENT13.2 team when I interviewed them. They are recalling the training prior to their 2012 deployment on a Georgia Training Team.

⁵⁴ Schatz, S., Bartlett, K., Burley, N. et al (2012). *Making Good Instructors Great: USMC Cognitive Readiness and Instructor Professionalization Initiatives*. (p. 9) Quantico, VA: Interservice/Industry Training, Simulation and Education Conference (I/ITSEC), Paper No. 12185.

⁵⁵ SSgt, MARCENT 13.2. An 0369 (enlisted infantry), former Active Duty who graduated with an undergraduate degree immediately prior to his first deployment to Georgia.

⁵⁶ Capt, MARCENT 13.2. An 0302 (infantry officer) and prior enlisted.

⁵⁷ I have confirmed that the Case Method Center, an organization within the Marine Corps University (MCU), did develop a case study on the Georgia war. While the rest of the G2G curriculum appears to have been created by contractors (MESH solutions) with oversight from Training and Education Command (TECOM), the Case Method Center and its case studies are available through MCU.

⁵⁸ SSgt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed June 29, 2013.

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every country is at war and poor surrounding it. That's why we're there. [...] They tried to disguise it that 'you're going to do great things,' but you realize you're there for the pipeline."⁵⁹ Like the SSgt, the Capt felt learning about the gas pipelines in the region gave him a better understanding of "US policy in the area where we were going."⁶⁰ This particular lesson was memorable for these Marines because it was geographically specific and gave them the "big blue arrow"⁶¹ understanding of their area of operations. What these comments suggest is that some Marines may be interested in the SC partnership from a strategic perspective, and if there are recent or current events that provide context for the agreements that produced the SC partnership, then those are worth sharing. This may contradict a presumption among some Marines who tend to think lower ranks do not care about or need to know beyond a certain level of information. While such a presumption may be true among the general purpose forces, SC teams may consist of higher ranking enlisted and mid-level officers, many of whom have an undergraduate education (especially among Reservists). Thus, a "need to know" or "stay in your lane" approach may be less appropriate for this type of audience. Security cooperation training, in other words, may include more "advanced" or strategic information in the curriculum that would otherwise seem excessive in a typical PTP workup.

That said, Marines do have varying educational backgrounds, and it is necessary to find the appropriate balance between challenging and overwhelming. There is some evidence that the SSgt was overwhelmed at times. He critiqued the instructor's delivery, saying "they used huge words. It sucked."⁶² He also described the training day as a rapid succession of learning different tools, which he felt he had no time to practice:

"We had practical application for two hours every day. It was a real quick seminar followed by multiple stations- almost like speed dating- you go from one station to another. It was good, but not long enough.[...] We needed more days, keep the hours, but spread out over more days."⁶³

The Capt, who also had a college education, was nevertheless critical of the instructors, though his opinion depended on the type of content. In one case, he started off by saying the G2G instructors were "all PhDs" and were "too into the weeds."⁶⁴ He continued, "They had us in a room thinking about how to create a robust training package, and we don't have the kind of time to teach that."⁶⁵ On the other hand, in our interview several months later, the Capt said one professor gave the "best instruction we had" because it was "not an S2⁶⁶ brief."⁶⁷ Without closer inspection, it may seem like the Capt is contradicting himself in these two interviews. But the dissimilar opinions are related to different content. It is easy to imagine how a PhD with no prior military experience may be off the mark when discussing best practices in training foreign forces. In the second comment the Capt felt the instructors' civilian status made more sense, given that the topic was about regional issues. This layering of opinions offers insight into a long-running debate about the ideal instructor background for a military audience. Some say prior or current military are far more preferable than civilians. However, one conclusion that could be drawn from these

⁵⁹ SSgt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed Feb. 19, 2014.

⁶⁰ Capt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed Sept. 15, 2013.

⁶¹ SSgt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed Feb. 19, 2014.

⁶² SSgt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed Feb. 19, 2014

⁶³ SSgt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed Feb 19, 2014

⁶⁴ Capt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed June 6, 2013.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Intelligence briefs are usually given by the S2, and typically include CLASSIFIED information. The Capt is saying that type of brief, which tends to focus on the enemy threat, was not as useful as this professor's brief on the civilian population and culture.

⁶⁷ Capt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed Sept. 15, 2013.

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interviews is that the lesson content should be more closely linked to the instructor's background and expertise. Prior military or related training experience with foreign forces becomes more important if the lesson is meant to address related topics. However, if the lesson content is about civilian life or politics or culture, then civilian instructors are acceptable, if not preferable.

A third Marine, a Sgt⁶⁸ also attended the G2G training, yet he did not mention it specifically in his interviews. He did, however, reveal an interesting and potentially enduring hazard for any security cooperation training, to include G2G. This is the tendency of Marines to treat the foreign forces "like Marines," despite being told otherwise. As the Sgt described,

"Before Georgia, everyone said 'they're not Marines,' but in my head, I still thought we could teach the same. Because I didn't know. I assumed this was how all militaries run across the world."⁶⁹⁷⁰

That kind of bias, or mirror imaging, is difficult to eliminate, no matter how explicit the instructor is, as this Sgt's comment indicates. His assumption about "all militaries" was more persistent than the instructor's warning to be prepared for a different military culture. He later described what he discovered about the Georgians,

"I was briefed, 'these guys are big, heavy, tough.' I was told I had to step up my game because I represent the Marine Corps. But it was the opposite. They weren't big. They let the little things get to them. My mentality of how I taught got me nowhere. I had to adapt to what they needed, and how they wanted it."⁷¹

This comment indicates a bit more nuance on the interplay between the Sgt's pre-conceived notions and the way the Georgian military was described. For instance, the Sgt heard that he had to "step up his game," which he interpreted to mean to act like a hard-core Marine (which, in a stereotypical Drill Instructor model, involves shouting, insulting, and threatening). This was perhaps reinforced by the imagery that Georgians were "big, heavy, tough." The irony is that the instructors who described the Georgian military may have been intending to avoid this very situation, but their word choice pointed the Sgt in the wrong direction. The lesson that can be drawn from this is that the tendency to mirror image among Marines must be carefully addressed, and that instructors should include specifics about the military culture, and why people may behave the way they do, rather than convey generalities such as "they are not Marines."

The Sgt was not alone in his initial approach to training the Georgians. Apparently the SSgt also started off on the wrong foot. But this story does not end badly. The Sgt and SSgt (in separate interviews) pointed out how they noticed their lack of progress in building rapport and what they did to adjust. One critical turnaround point, according to the SSgt, was when their unit played against the Georgians in a soccer game, saying:

"It took a sporting event before we got together. Soccer. Instructors vs. students. We had a good game, and that allowed them to see us as normal, not as d*cks. They saw us smile. Once you have friendship, you can do whatever you want."⁷²

⁶⁸ Sgt, MARCENT 13.2. An 0311.

⁶⁹ Sgt, interviewed July 1, 2013.

⁷⁰ The Sgt never explicitly said who described Georgians in this way. It could have been other Marines, or instructors from MCSCG, from CAOCL, or from the G2G course. Regardless of the source, this misunderstanding is indicative of a persistent challenge for any advisor training.

⁷¹ Sgt, MARCENT 13.2, interviewed July 1, 2013.

⁷² SSgt, interviewed June 29, 2013.

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Loss of rapport in the training environment can be balanced out by time spent together in leisure and recreation, as these two Marines discovered. By their descriptions, they used this turnaround point to start over, and adapted their own training style to better suit the Georgian military culture.

By the time the Sgt and the SSgt were preparing to deploy to Jordan with MARCENT 13.2, they demonstrated approachable, friendly, and unaggressive teaching styles. For instance, at the CERTEX in July 2013, I observed the SSgt give a class on the 540B crew-served weapon. Before launching into the instruction, he allowed the role players to pick up the unloaded weapons in order to feel their weight and inspect them; which is unlikely the case when Marines train Marines on the 540B. The SSgt also used humor and held small competitions to keep the students engaged in the learning process. The Sgt taught a lesson about hand and arm signals that also appeared to depart from a standard Marine Corps approach. Rather than teach the Marine hand and arm signal to the role players, he demonstrated the patrol movement that he wanted to communicate (halt, freeze, gather up, proceed), and asked the students to devise a hand signal for it. Often, the group came up with a gesture similar to what Marines already used, but they were able to use critical thinking skills along the way. One can argue about whether or not these approaches are ideal in all situations, but these hands-on, participatory, and open-minded teaching techniques may be more effective than a standard Marine Corps approach when working with other military cultures.

The “*Making Good Instructors Great*”™ curriculum had many stated objectives beyond teaching these three Marines specifically how to work with the Georgian military. One stated objective was to provide “cognitive readiness” so that the Marines could “rapidly decide and act in dynamic, complex and ambiguous environments.”⁷³ The Sgt and SSgt did not start out as flawless instructors in Georgia. However, they altered their instructional techniques, which may indicate that they did have the “cognitive readiness” to adapt, even though their adaptation may not have been rapid. When the Sgt described the Georgians two paragraphs above, his analysis was that it was his mentality, not the Georgian’s, which got him nowhere. This social perspective taking is important in cross-cultural situations, which is why it is included in the MCSCG (and reportedly the G2G) curriculum. Even though social perspective taking is addressed in training, it is likely that some Marines will continue to make the wrong choices. Perhaps no training program, no matter how perfect, can prevent that. But it is a reasonable goal to design training that improves a Marine’s ability to recognize his or her errors or limitations, and encourages the ability to create and implement strategies that work better. Whether these Marines would have adapted their teaching styles without the G2G program (or MCSCG training) is not known. However, there is room for the possibility that a participatory learning method that encourages critical thinking and develops interpersonal skills is as effective, if not more, as the PowerPoint teaching method alone.

⁷³ Schatz, S., Bartlett, K., Burley, N. et al (2012). *Making Good Instructors Great: USMC Cognitive Readiness and Instructor Professionalization Initiatives*. (p. 1). Quantico, VA: Interservice/Industry Training, Simulation and Education Conference (I/ITSEC), Paper No. 12185.

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