



# USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

## **THE FOREIGN AREA SNCO BETA TEST ASSESSMENT: 15<sup>TH</sup> MARINE EXPEDITIONARY UNIT (MEU)**

By Vicky Jasparro, Translational Research Group, CAOCL

CAOCL Point of Contact: LtCol George Robinson, OpsO, 703-4321749, [george.m.robinson1@usmc.mil](mailto:george.m.robinson1@usmc.mil)  
SME: Vicky Jasparro, 703-4320281, [vjasparro@prosol1.com](mailto:vjasparro@prosol1.com)

Disclaimer: The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the individual author and do not necessarily represent the views of either CAOCL or any other governmental agency. Any references to this document should include the foregoing statement.



# USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

## Table of Contents

BLUF.....	3
Introduction.....	3
Role of the FAS.....	4
Discussion – Value Added and Gaps.....	5
Culture Expertise.....	5
Culture Training – Value Added.....	5
Culture Training – Gaps.....	6
Problem Solving – Value Added.....	6
Messaging – Value Added.....	7
Language Expertise.....	7
Language Training – Value Added.....	7
Language Training – Gaps.....	8
Advising – Value Added.....	8
Interpreting – Value Added.....	8
LNO – Value Added.....	9
Shortcomings.....	9
Discovery Learning.....	9
There Was ‘Only One of Him’.....	9
Explaining the Why.....	10
Recommendations.....	11
References.....	13



# USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

## **BLUF:**

15th MEU agreed to conduct a beta test of the FAS program. The FAS program is designed to fill a gap in Language, Regional Education, and Cultural Knowledge (LREC) at the tactical level. It is also well placed to help facilitate the meeting of collective Operational Culture and Language (OCOL) and Security Cooperation (SC) Training & Readiness (T&R) event standards.

GySgt Andrew Hodges was the FAS for 15<sup>th</sup> MEU. Hodges is a Middle East / North Africa Subject Matter Expert (SME) who entered the FAS program via the experience-track. He has lived in the Middle East and North Africa for a total of 12 years and he speaks Arabic, Farsi and Dari.

GySgt Hodges provided 15th MEU with region and culture training relevant to each Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) event and liberty call and created training for possible real world MEU operations. He taught basic Arabic classes, provided Arabic language interpretation and translation, and worked as an advisor, linguist and Liaison Officer (LNO). In addition, he assisted with culturally appropriate messaging and used his culture and language skills to turn around several situations that had gone awry. GySgt Hodges created a strong positive impression with 15<sup>th</sup> MEU and his contribution was certainly value added.

GySgt Hodges achieved the FAS program's goals. He provided quality training, education, advising and interpreting services to fill LREC gaps, and in the process helped the MEU with collective OCOL and SC T&R events – particularly in the Interaction functional area. There is no doubt the FAS program should go forward. The following are a list of recommendations for the program as it develops (see pg. 11 for more detail):

- 1) Build and maintain the FAS program.
- 2) Attach at least one FAS to every MEU.
- 3) Attach FAS capability as early as possible to facilitate involvement in both planning and training.
- 4) Provide MEU commanders with an overview of the FAS program well ahead of workups and deployment. Ensure these materials clearly explain the FAS capability – in planning, training and operations. Include a recommendation to place FAS in the S-3. Follow up in person with MEU Command Element (CE).
- 5) Provide FAS with CAOCL training in operational culture, culture general, military culture and tactical language/phrases. Ensure that FAS focus their on-ship training in these areas to maximize relevance and utility.
- 6) Ensure FAS are well versed in the OCOL and the SC T&R Manuals and able to link their on-ship training to collective event standards and the SC Mission Essential Task List (METL).
- 7) Ensure FAS have expert level language skills relevant to the region where they will spend the majority of their deployment.
- 8) Ensure FAS are well versed in the strategic purpose behind TSC and have multiple opportunities and venues to share this knowledge across the MEU.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

15<sup>th</sup> MEU took part in a Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned (MCCLL) Collection. As part of this effort various individuals (to include Vicky Jasparro – a culture SME from CAOCL – and several MCCLL Program Analysts) conducted culture focused interviews with members of 15<sup>th</sup> MEU in May and June 2013. These interviews



# USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

included questions about the FAS capability. The following is an analysis of the 15<sup>th</sup> MEU FAS program beta test based on the interviews conducted.

GySgt Andrew Hodges attached to 15<sup>th</sup> MEU on March 16 2012 during workups. Due to his Intelligence MOS, initially he was assigned to the S-2. Part way through the pre-deployment exercises it became clear to both Hodges and the Command Element (CE) that based on the operational nature of the FAS capability, he would be better placed within the S-3. Hodges transferred and then deployed with the MEU on 17 September 2012 for eight months to the PACOM and CENTCOM AORs. Although assigned to the S-3, he remained available to work with S-2 on joint operations. By the end of the deployment there was general agreement amongst the MEU staff that the S-3 was the best place for him. *"I think we agreed that he probably should work for the OpsO, but there are tasks within the Two realm that the intelligence officer has to retain cognizance over. I think there's also a benefit of keeping him in operations and not labeling him a Two guy. He becomes, to a degree, the face of the MEU because he has that language capability and I don't know we want to tag the guy who's out talking with and interfacing with foreign forces as an Intel guy because then the assumption is he's a collector, and that will certainly change the dynamic."* [LtCol John O'Neal, XO 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Jasparro, pgs. 15-16]

## ROLE OF THE FAS:

While deployed, the FAS played a multifaceted role. He:

1. **Provided culture briefs and basic Modern Standard Arabic language training.** Prior to deployment, GySgt Hodges attended various training courses (see the AAR on the FAS effort in support of 15<sup>th</sup> MEU for details). These included a Foreign Services Institute (FSI) course focused on the Near East and a one week CAOCL 'Train the Trainer' course where he received operational culture training specific to each country the MEU planned to visit. GySgt Hodges then *"created classes off CAOCL briefs for close-circuit TV for all the Marines and Sailors to watch"* on ship. [GySgt Andrew Hodges, FAS, 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Jasparro, pg. 4] Due to his background in the Middle East, Hodges was able to use his experience to enhance many of the culture briefs and to develop Arabic language classes.
2. **Acted as an advisor and linguist to the MEU CO, the MEU XO and others.** During each of the TSC exercises (except Kuwait), GySgt Hodges went ashore and used his LREC knowledge and skills to help ensure the Officer in Charge (OIC) made a good first impression.
3. **Helped to make up for a shortage in interpreters.** Although there were usually sufficient interpreters at the senior level, there were considerable gaps at the troop level. GySgt Hodges was therefore called upon to use his language skill – to include tactical phrases – to assist with the TSC exercises.
4. **Worked as an LNO.** When required, GySgt Hodges used his Arabic language capability to coordinate between the MEU and host nation partners.
5. **Assisted with culturally appropriate messaging.** The FAS was teamed up with information operations (MCIOC) Marines to help manage perceptions by building culturally sensitive messages that would be well received by the host nation.
6. **Tried to provide Marines with the 'why'.** For each TSC exercise GySgt Hodges endeavored to explain to Marines why they were conducting the TSC and why they were working with that particular host nation partner.
7. **Applied his culture and language expertise to prevent cultural mishaps and turn around situations and interactions that had gone awry.**



# USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

8. **Worked as a watch chief and then as a watch officer within the S3.** Despite his 17 years in the Marine Corps, GySgt Hodges had no experience on a MEU. Therefore he was given this duty to help him learn about MEU operations.

## DISCUSSION - VALUE ADDED AND GAPS:

Having the FAS capability onboard 15<sup>th</sup> MEU was a force multiplier. Not only was GySgt Hodges able to use his experience and training to create region and culture specific training relevant to each TSC event, liberty call and potential real-world MEU operation, but he was also able to provide Arabic language training, interpretation, and translation at a variety of levels, work as a cultural advisor and as an LNO, make sense of cultural nuances, read non-verbal communication, ask the right questions of the right people, and resolve culture related problems.

Most Marines who interacted with GySgt Hodges came away with a strong positive impression of his cultural and regional expertise and his language skills. For example,

- LtCol John O'Neal, MEU XO stated that *"...having the Foreign Area Specialist was key. He put a lot of effort into developing cultural briefs and teaching basic language classes to the Marines going ashore."* [Interview with Jaspardo, pg 9]
- He also stated that GySgt Hodges *"...was very helpful on a number of levels... I wish I'd had two or three of him while we were in the Middle East."* [Interview with Jaspardo, pg. 14]
- Col Scott Campbell, MEU CO, added that *"his expertise was superb"* and *"his ability to provide situational awareness of the environment and the culture that we're going to operate in was significant value added."* [CO, 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Clark, pg. 11]

### 1. Cultural Expertise:

GySgt Hodges attached to 15<sup>th</sup> MEU with expertise gained primarily from over 12 years spent living and working in the Middle East and North Africa. In addition he brought knowledge he had acquired from CAOCL operational culture training and FSI regional training. While attached to 15<sup>th</sup> MEU he put his cultural expertise to use in training Marines, problem solving and messaging.

#### Culture Training – Value Added:

GySgt Hodges produced and then circulated culture briefs via close circuit TV. Overall they were well regarded. According to LtCol John O'Neal, MEU XO, the FAS *"provided good education and training for the troops before we rolled into each of the countries."* [Interview with Jaspardo, pg. 14] This sentiment was echoed by Capt. Jerome Greco, Company CO, BLT 3/5 who said, *"He was helpful, certainly helpful in disseminating products that were maybe a little more in depth than what we had at our finger tips."* [Interview with Jaspardo, pg. 7]

GySgt Hodges' culture briefs provided the Marines with 'culture specific' knowledge. *"Whether we were going in for liberty or whether we were going there for a TSC, he was providing... cultural briefs on each of the [specific] countries to build a little bit of knowledge before we went in."* [LtCol O'Neal, MEU XO, Interview with Jaspardo, pg. 14] In general the briefs were well received and deemed useful, especially for the younger Marines. He *"provided good education and training for the troops before we rolled into each of the countries."* [ibid] Col Scott Campbell, MEU CO, commented that he gave *"good solid briefs"* and *"reminded me of some things,"* but *"I've been to the*



# USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

*Middle East so many times and I've been to all these countries repeatedly; there weren't going to be a lot of epiphanies with regard to culture in the Middle East...his real value was to the younger officers that had spent most of their time either in Iraq or Afghanistan and his ability to explain the differences...*" [Interview with Jaspardo, pg. 11] Some Marines added that GySgt Hodges' expertise in culture was a good complement and addition to the S2's briefs which focused more on the country and describing foreign populations as enemies and threats than on the culture.

## Culture Training - Gaps:

A few Marines commented that some of the culture briefs they received seemed outdated or that things on the ground were different (generally less strict) than the training had led them to expect. For example, Sgt Taylor Hartman explained that he has been in the Marine Corps since 2007 and that a lot of the material he was being taught was *"still stuff from Iraq 2004; you know, don't show the bottoms of your soles, and obviously don't eat in front of them during Ramadan, but things of that nature, and we go 'there' and we're trying to be all nice. We don't want to start an international incident and then we look at the guys over here that are doing the things we were told not to do and we're like, "Are they disrespecting us?" and it's like "No, that's how they act, they're normal." It's like well, "Alright" and we just take it for face value and move on, but it's kind of confusing sometimes.*" [Sgt Taylor Hartman, Squad Leader BLT 3/5, Interview with Jaspardo, pg 4]

Providing culture specific training that presents a particular image of a foreign culture group as strictly following various rules and customs is not necessarily a bad thing. However in future the FAS could bolster the training provided to Marines by incorporating various culture general concepts. Culture general training arms Marines with social science concepts and cross cultural skills that are relevant to any culture anywhere. For example, the concept of variation explains how all culture groups exhibit a range of values, beliefs and behavior and therefore one should not assume that things on the ground will exactly mirror descriptions provided in training. Equipping the Marines with such concepts would allow them to use their training to better make sense of realities on the ground anywhere. Other important concepts to include would be holism, reciprocity, mobilization, and change, while relevant skills might include self-reflection, perspective taking, withholding judgment, and not mirror imaging, among others.

Several Marines also expressed that they would like to have received military culture training in how to train their foreign military counterparts from specific host nations, rather than being expected to just show up and do it. *"...what we do is we just sort of tell the Marines "Okay, just work with them and be nice to them and be patient." And that's important to tell them that. They need to understand it's important to the commander, and the Marines do that, but we don't really give them the tools or the training to approach it successfully, to understand how lance corporal Peterson, fire team leader, can bring together a squad of Emirates and teach them about land nav or clearing a room, and I think we could do that if we sent that young Marine to the right school..."* [Major Matthew Peterson, OpsO BLT 3/5, Interview with Jaspardo, pg. 9] Such demand for military culture training complements the need for culture general training and is not new. A suggestion would be for the FAS to be 'that young Marine' and to provide more focused military culture training to the MEU.

## Problem Solving – Value Added:

On several occasions GySgt Hodges was called in to apply his cultural expertise - his ability to communicate with a foreign population both verbally and non-verbally - to turn around situations that had gone awry. Just one example follows: *"...a Marine Corps Training Team mission in UAE, I met with them immediately landing on*



# USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

*ground and they snatched me up as soon as possible just for a 20-30 minute meeting with the commanding officer of the base... [T]hey informed me that there had already been an issue with interaction between the U.S. Marines and the Emirate forces due to the fact that somebody was demanding a forklift, or expecting a forklift, thinking that it was the same culture as in the Marine Corps, the same background, the same expectations.” [GySgt Andrew Hodges, FAS 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, pg. 6] It appears this individual did not have the necessary culture general skill set to navigate the interaction successfully. “He immediately [said], “Hey, we can’t get the training done unless we get a forklift”... He didn’t ask the right person and he should have asked the commanding officer, and instead of asking for it, [he should have] sat down with him, had a cup of tea, talked to him briefly, got to know the man, and this went on in Saudi Arabia as well. It could have gone a lot smoother if there was a little more just take a moment to sit with your counterpart, niceties about where you’re from, who you are. If that was conducted a little more at the higher level, that would have helped things and expedited the whole training evolution. It was resolved of course. It just took a day or two longer for that to happen, which a day or two when you needed it immediately.”[GySgt Andrew Hodges, FAS 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Jsparro, pg. 7]*

Other examples exist, as well as situations where GySgt Hodges was not around to prevent or fix a cultural mishap. Clearly having his sort of cultural expertise available is a huge resource for the MEU, and having more than one of him would spread that expertise more broadly.

## Messaging – Value Added:

The OpsO felt that the FAS was well placed to ensure that the messages the MEU was sending were culturally and linguistically appropriate. According to LtCol O’Neal, “...the OpsO teamed [the FAS] up with our information operations Marines and he was able to help them build a message that would be received better by the host nation, knowing and understanding the culture better than the rest of us.” [LtCol John O’Neal, XO, 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Jsparro, pg. 14] GySgt Hodges felt that teaming him up with information operations was an appropriate use of his time and skill commenting in his AAR that “MCIOC Marines have been a force multiplier for the FAS program.” [AAR, pg. 6]

## **2. Language Expertise:**

GySgt Hodges speaks fluent Arabic, as well as Dari and Farsi. While deployed with 15<sup>th</sup> MEU he used his Arabic language skills to train Marines, advise, interpret, and, when needed, work as an LNO. Large parts of the job he did for 15<sup>th</sup> MEU could not have been done without his fluency in Arabic.

## Language Training – Value Added:

GySgt Hodges provided very basic Arabic language training that gave the Marines a few words in the host nation language to help them make introductions and build rapport with their foreign military counterparts. This knowledge was put to good use. “You don’t have to, by any means, need to be able to communicate seriously, but showing that you’ve gone to the effort to learn a few words is a valuable skill and I think the Marines, by and large, have done that. I think those skills are helpful in terms of the relationship, more than their practical use, they’re helpful just in terms of the relationship, building rapport, and the like.” [LtCol Christeon Griffin, CO BLT 3/5, Interview with Jsparro, pg. 4]





# USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

## Language Training - Gaps:

GySgt Hodges Arabic language training did not enable serious or fluent communication or bridge the language gap which existed, particularly at the troop level where foreign partners usually did not speak English. That kind of knowledge would require much longer and more sustained language training and an unrealistic amount of time and resources. One way to enable greater communication between Marines and their foreign military partners might be to hire more, and more highly qualified, interpreters. However, this would also take resources that are not always available. In addition, a deeper issue seems to be the type of language the Marines need to convey. *"Trying to explain something technical to someone in a different language is extremely difficult..."* [1<sup>st</sup> Lt Patrick Moecher, Platoon CO BLT 3/5, Interview with Jasparro, pg. 3] Capt Bradley Fromm, Company XO BLT 3/5, also commented that *"...the thing I think is the most difficult, and if there is any way to get it out there somewhere, is understanding the technical military terms when it comes to tactics. That's the biggest drawback because a lot of interpreters don't necessarily understand those and to be able to try and convey those and break it down becomes more of a difficulty."* [Interview with Jasparro, pg. 9] A more practical way forward therefore might be for the FAS to provide the MEU with focused training in 'tactical language/phrases' – material the FAS is already very familiar with. This approach would arm the Marines with more than just niceties; tactical language would provide Marines with a practical technical military vocabulary specifically designed for TSC exercises.

## Advising – Value Added:

GySgt Hodges used his language (and cultural) expertise to advise the MEU Command Element (CE). During TSC Exercise Crocodillo in East Timor, GySgt Hodges was a member of the Forward Command Element. During all follow on TSC events he worked as Senior Enlisted Advisor (SEA) to LtCol John O'Neal, the MEU XO and OIC. According to O'Neal, *"He was a tremendous asset to me, because he spoke the language, when we got ashore, as an icebreaker; just to get in with the leadership, demonstrate that we were sensitive enough to the culture that we had a few people that spoke the language and could kind of break that ice."* [Interview with Jasparro, pg. 9] The FAS role was extremely important in this regard.

## Interpreting – Value Added:

The FAS filled a very real gap by acting as an interpreter at the troop level. LtCol John O'Neal commented that GySgt Hodges was with him ashore in Saudi Arabia and UAE where he proved tremendously helpful. *"When you're conducting training at the fire team level there aren't enough interpreters to go around. Talking with the battalion and figuring out where the biggest gaps were in language capability determined where we were going to push him each day."* [XO 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Jasparro, pg. 14] Capt. Travis Hord noted that it was Hodges ability to translate technical – or tactical -l terms that was especially helpful. *"Having an interpreter there is one thing, having an interpreter that can talk about [High Mobility Multi Purpose Vehicle] HMMWV and HMMWV nomenclature is so much more important to me because I'm not talking about how to fix the water out here in the field. I'm talking about this is how you employ this weapons system..."* [Assistant OpsO, BLT 3/5, Interview with Lee, pgs. 9-10] LtCol Wischmeyer added, *"...they went to the local colleges where students were working on their English, and majoring in English, and they brought those folks over [as interpreters], but that's difficult because unless you have a background in the military, with military slogans, and sayings, it's tough to translate, and we've had that problem before with the Japanese and some others."* [OpsO 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Jasparro, pg. 8] Technical or tactical language is clearly a unique and highly valued FAS capability.





# USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

## LNO – Value Added:

When needed, GySgt Hodges worked as an LNO. For example, in UAE he *“worked in the Combat Operations Center (COC) as an LNO for the Emirates for the first two days just trying to identify anything that I could do and assist with.”* [GySgt Hodges, FAS, 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Jasparro, pg. 7] Essentially, he used his Arabic language skills and knowledge of the Marine Corps to answer questions, identify USMC POCs, and explain USMC Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). In Saudi Arabia he *“supported at their COC... They wanted a joint COC, however, the Marines had already set up on the other base logistically on ADVON and it was not possible to link both the COCs up together on a large scale, so I worked there as a liaison officer for the two bases and coordination, and that was very, very successful.”* [ibid.] While perhaps not ideal as they take FAS expertise away from the OIC and away from the troops, LNO services are certainly something the FAS capability is equipped to provide.

## **3. Shortcomings:**

### Discovery Learning:

The FAS program is new and therefore the Marines of 15<sup>th</sup> MEU were learning as they went along. As a result, although overall GySgt Hodges was well utilized, there were instances where he could have been more effectively employed. *“We did an okay job using him. I think we could've done better. There was some debate, initially: Does he work for the Two, does he work for the Three... if I were doing it again, I'd spend more time thinking about how I was going to use him. When he kind of showed up I was like "Hey great. Okay, let's see what we're going to with him" and we talked to him and used him, but I don't think we had a great plan for using him. We understood, as time went by, the full capability the Marine brought, and I don't think we necessarily utilized him to his full potential early enough in the deployment.”* [Col Scott Campbell, CO 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Clark, pg. 11]

Since the program is in its infancy, it was incumbent upon GySgt Hodges to promote himself and explain his capabilities. Although this approach is not ideal, it appears Hodges was fairly effective in this role. *“He was a good salesman. He definitely educated as many officers as he could, including myself, and sat down and ensured we understood why he's out there, what his capabilities are, and how we can make use of them. The overall regard was he's a SME that's available for our use and can be used in that classroom environment.”* [Capt Nicholas Martinez, LogO, BLT 3/5, Interview with Lee, pg. 4]

Although the FAS was involved in many different endeavors, he was not involved in the planning process. This was partly due to his late attachment, and as a result, cultural considerations were not adequately incorporated. In hindsight there was recognition that the FAS should have attached earlier and been involved in the planning process and that if he had taken part various oversights and mishaps perhaps could have been avoided. *“I should've had him on all of our planning meetings with the host countries. We should've had him there for all of those. Again, that's one of the limitations of the program when you kind of get it thrown at you, but I would add him at all the Initial, Mid, and Final Planning conferences with all the TSC events...”* [LtCol William Wischmeyer, S3 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Jasparro, pg. 12]

### There Was ‘Only One of Him’:

GySgt Hodges is one Marine; the MEU incorporates three ships and over 2000 Marines. GySgt Hodges could not be in all places at all times. As result, by default, his impact was limited. *“It was a great capability but too few. He*



# USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

*had really limited impact to what we were doing simply because there was one or maybe two of them and they just weren't able to geographically be where we needed them to be when we needed them to be there. I think it was more in line to if he did go to the exercise and was working with the exercise forces, but it was a void on the ADVON for him."* [Maj Brodie Carmichael, S4 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Clark, pg. 10] *"Gunny Hodges, I would write him an award right now, just from my interaction. There needs to be more of him... One for the planning, the people that go forward, and then if you're going to be in multiple locations, if I were to say a number, I would say like five..."* [Capt Travid Hord, Assistant OpsO, BLT 3/5, Interview with Lee, pg. 10]

When MEUs deploy they typically travel through several regions and interact with several different culture groups and military partners. It is impossible for one FAS to be an expert in all areas and groups. One solution might be for a MEU to attach several FAS's – rather than just one - for all or part of each deployment, each FAS specializing in a different region. *"I think having a Pacific, a guy... maybe they don't stay on the boat the whole time and maybe you bring a guy out with the Pacific leg, and you're fly him home and you swap him out with an Arabic guy, or a Middle Eastern guy. Africa is another one... So I think there are other regions we could use the expertise in. The question is: Do you have them all the time; do you fly them in and out; what does that look like?"* [Colonel Scott Campbell, CO, 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Clark, pg. 12]

## Explaining the Why:

According to GySgt Hodges, some of the most important information individual marines need for TSC events is *"an understanding of why they are conducting the exercise or why it's important for them as Americans to be there and an understanding of the host nation's perspective and why they seek, need, or want the US as a partner."* [GySgt Andrew Hodges, MEU FAS, Interview with Clark, pgs. 10-11] This is especially the case when they are conducting one TSC exercise after another, with little break or opportunity for involvement in real-world operations and plenty of opportunity for burn-out, and where the TSC events look very different from typical Marine Corps training. While Hodges tried to provide this sort of information, there was only one of him, and it is not clear that he had enough opportunities or the right venue to really get the point across.

At some level, and amongst some Marines, there was a notional understanding that the strategic intent of TSC exercises is to maintain and build relationships. For example, *"the end state was for a foreign force to work side-by-side with the U.S. Marines and to feel good doing it and to gain some confidence at the end of it and to walk away saying "Boy, those Marines are good to work with" and that was satisfying rather than "Boy, we really learned these three or four tangible skills."* [Capt Jerome Greco, Company CO BLT 3/5, Interview with Jaspardo, pg. 4]

However, it appears the Marines did not really comprehend what this sort of prioritization – relationship building over skill building – actually meant in practical terms for the exercises, and this led to some frustrations. Marines typically 'train like we fight,' yet in TSC, if the overarching goal is to build and maintain relationships, Marines may find themselves having to stray quite far from what they consider effective training. For example, *"The final exercise was for their generals. I think two or three of them showed up; nice guys, they spoke pretty good English and when they showed up they were very affable and engaging with the Marines, but the exercise itself was nothing more than a scripted dog and pony show, so it was very, very frustrating to go through the machinations of getting all of the Marines and all of our gear off the ships, to Saudi Arabia, logistically supplied, and everything that goes into that, to live there for (I think) ten days (I don't recall) in relatively uncomfortable conditions; in extremely windy, cold, sandy, and they had absolutely no tactical concerns... We joked about it; it ended up being sort of like Dark Horse Productions, like a Hollywood movie thing, like we all should have a screen credit on this. And then, sure enough, the VIPs showed up. They were on the viewing stand and it bore no resemblance*



# USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

*whatsoever to what we would actually do in the given scenario. It was just 'make it look cool' for the dignitaries and they were completely fine with that and that is contradictory to Marine Corps training principles, which is to train how we fight. The same thing happened in UAE with the final exercise, just not at all concerned about actual tactics, but making it look good for VIPs and that was very frustrating.” [Major Matthew Peterson, OpsO BLT 3/5, Interview with Jaspardo, pg. 7]*

If Marines really understand from the beginning both that their job is to do what the other military wants and that, due to the particular military culture, in countries like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and UAE, a ‘dog and pony show’ final exercise is what is expected, frustration might be avoided. *“If you really understand that the whole point of the exercise is to reinforce those strategic relationships and take that to heart, then really, the most important thing is not your unit’s training, it’s reinforcing the relationship, which means going to whatever length possible, within reason or your capacity, to do what they ask of you...” [LtCol Christeon Griffin, CO 3/5, Interview with Jaspardo, pg. 4]* This is an area where, with forethought, the FAS capability could contribute.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) Build and maintain the FAS program for the long term. It is value added, fills LREC gaps and assists Marines in meeting OCOC and SC T&R. There is no doubt the program should go forward.

The following recommendations cover ways in which the FAS program could be structured and/or bolstered to better support USMC for the long term.

- 2) Attach at least one FAS to every MEU. If possible attach more than one FAS, each with varying LREC expertise. Match FAS expertise to where the MEU will deploy and who the Marines will interact with.
- 3) Attach the FAS capability as early as possible to facilitate their involvement in both planning and training. Create a specific role for the FAS in MEU planning and training.
- 4) To avoid discovery learning, MEU Commanders and their staff must be able to decide well ahead of work-ups and deployment how best to employ their FAS capability. The FAS program should assist by providing materials describing the FAS capability – in planning, training and operations - and outlining how and where to most effectively employ a FAS. These materials should include a strong recommendation to place the FAS in the S-3, but to make the capability available to assist the S-2 as needed and when available. Program materials should be widely disseminated to the MEUs and there should be follow-up in person with each MEU. Follow up should not be restricted to the Officer corps. For most effective use of the FAS capability, understanding must reach down through all the ranks.
- 5) FAS training for all tracks should include CAOCL training in operational culture, culture general (concepts and skills), military culture and tactical language. Ensure FAS focus their on-ship training for the MEU in these areas to increase its relevance and utility.
- 6) Ensure FAS are well versed in the Operational Culture & Language and the Security Cooperation T&R Manuals and able to link training to collective event standards.



## USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

- 7) Ensure that FAS have expert level language skills relevant to the region in which they will spend the majority of their deployment.
- 8) Ensure that FAS are well-versed in the strategic purpose behind TSC and have multiple venues and opportunities to explain this across the MEU.



# USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

## REFERENCES:

### Interviews:

Campbell, Scott, Col, CO, 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Clark, 05/30/2013  
Campbell, Scott, Col, CO, 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Jasparro, 05/30/2013  
Carmichael, Brodie, Maj, LogO, 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Clark, 05/30/2013  
Fromm, Bradley, Capt, Company XO, BLT 3/5, Interview with Jasparro, 05/29/2013  
Greco, Jerome, Capt, Company CO, BLT 3/5, Interview with Jasparro, 05/29/2013  
Griffin, Christeon, LtCol, CO, BLT 3/5, Interview with Jasparro, 05/29/2013  
Hartman, Taylor, Sgt, Squad Leader, BLT 3/5, Interview with Jasparro, 05/30/2013  
Hodges, Andrew, GySgt, FAS, 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Clark, 05/29/2013  
Hodges, Andrew, GySgt, FAS, 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Jasparro, 06/03/2013  
Hord, Travis, Capt, Assistant OpsO, BLT 3/5, Interview with Lee, 06/04/2013  
Martinez, Nicholas, Capt, LogO, BLT 3/5, Interview with Lee, 05/29/2013  
Moecher, Patrick, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt, Platoon CO, BLT 3/5, Interview with Jasparro, 05/29/2013  
O'Neal, John, LtCol, XO, 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Jasparro, 06/03/2013  
Peterson, Matthew, Maj, OpsO, BLT 3/5, Interview with Jasparro, 05/29/2013  
Wischmeyer, William, LtCol, OpsO, 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, Interview with Jasparro, 05/31/2013

### AAR:

Hodges, Andrew, GySgt, FAS 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, AAR on FAS Effort in Support of 15<sup>th</sup> MEU, 04/15/2013

### Other:

Operational Culture and Language Training and Readiness Manual, NAVMC 3500.65A, 01/30/2012  
Security Cooperation Training and Readiness Manual, NAVMC 3500.59A, 10/03/2011