Chapter 5
Mission Essential Task List

Overview

Marine Corps training programs are based on combat requirements. Units cannot achieve and sustain proficiency on every possible task. Therefore, commanders must selectively identify the tasks that are essential to accomplishing the unit's combat mission. The compilation of tasks critical to combat mission accomplishment is a unit's METL. The METL provides the warfighting focus to a unit's training program by providing the commander with a listing of tasks the unit must be able to perform. It is the basis used to design the unit training plan and to develop the resources necessary to meet the training plan. The commander is key in the development and revision of the METL, which frames the outline of the unit's training plans.

"The unit commander must recognize that, even after the elimination of 'nice to have' activities, necessary functions remain which cannot be fully executed within the resources available to him. His only recourse is 'to do first things first.' He must analyze his mission and determine the relative priority and the degree of interdependence of the functions essential to mission accom- plishment." [5]

Gen. Bruce C. Clarke, USA

Combat-Focused Training

Peacetime training requirements must focus on a unit's planned combat mission. Commanders can achieve a successful training program by consciously narrowing the unit's training focus to a limited number of tasks that are essential to mission accomplishment during combat. These tasks make up the commander's METL (see app. B for an example of a battalion's METL development). Each unit's training program ensures that its members train as they are going to fight by focusing training proficiency on accomplishment of METL tasks. A combat focus is critical throughout the training process as it provides priority to training for combat roles, vice peacetime routines. By prioritizing training to meet METL tasks, the commander can now allocate resources to the training priorities. Training must be prioritized in the following order:

    Mission-oriented training (training that ensures the unit can fulfill combat requirements).
    Formal training (see app. C).
    Ancillary training (see app. C).

Prioritization of training requirements is a crucial step in the commander's development of a plan to meet the unit's mission-essential tasks. Planning links the unit's METL with the subsequent execution and evaluation of training. A relatively centralized process, planning

develops mutually-supporting, METL-based training at all levels within a unit. The commander provides three principal inputs to this planning process: the METL, the training assessment, and commander's guidance.

METL Development

Commander's Analysis

The commander reviews all applicable tasks and identifies those tasks, for training priority, that are essential to accomplishment of the unit's combat mission. The commander focuses the unit's efforts and resources on training for these essential tasks to achieve proficiency. The unit trains for all other tasks as resources allow. This process concentrates the unit's peacetime training efforts on the most important collective training tasks required to accomplish the unit's combat mission. Since units cannot achieve and sustain proficiency on every possible training task, this selection process reduces the number of training tasks. Figure 5-1 depicts the process that leaders use to identify and select mission-essential tasks. Figure 5-2 shows an example of a division mission essential task, with subordinate unit MPSs associated to it, derived from its mission statement. The mission statement depicts the start of the METL development process by determining the most important division training tasks.

METL Fundamentals

The following fundamentals apply to METL development:

The METL is derived from the organization's T/O mission statement, doctrinal employment, combat missions, and other related tasks.

Each organization's METL must support and complement higher headquarters' METL.

The availability of resources does not affect METL development. The METL is an unconstrained statement of the tasks required to accomplish combat missions.

In similar types of units, mission-essential tasks may vary significantly because of different combat missions or geographical loca- tions.

Figure 5-1. Inputs into METL Selection.

All units, from a Marine expeditionary force to individual battalions/squadrons, prepare METLs. Command groups and staff elements at each level develop METLs to address mission-essential tasks in their areas of responsibility. Each unit's METL is approved by the next higher commander in the operational chain of command. Command group METLs are approved by the commander. Staff METLs are approved by the unit's commander or chief of staff.

Units that conduct daily support functions also prepare a METL. The METL for these support units must address the differences between a peacetime operating environment and a combat operating environment that requires the support mission to be accomplished under austere conditions on an active battlefield.

The METLs for combat, combat support, and combat service support organizations must be coordinated during the development process. This requirement supports the concept that, whenever possible, training is conducted as combined-arms teams. A key component of the senior commander's METL approval process is to determine if subordinate units and units that frequently accompany the command on operations have properly coordinated their METLs. Since the METL forms the basis for the funding and resourcing of a unit's training plans, it is stabilized once approved. The METL is normally modified only if changes occur in the unit's missions. Since combat plans are the most critical input to the METL development process, senior commanders make every effort to stabilize combat missions. A significant revision of a unit's mission can result in major changes to its METL and require subsequent major modifications to training plans.

The commander has the responsibility for developing a training strategy that maintains unit proficiency for all tasks designated as mission-essential. There should be no attempt to prioritize tasks within the METL. By definition, all METL tasks are equally essential to ensure mission accomplishment.

Commanders involve subordinate commanders and their senior SNCOs in METL development to create a team approach to mis-sion-oriented training. Subordinate participation develops a common understanding of the unit's critical mission requirements so that METLs throughout the organization are mutually supporting.

SAMPLE MISSION STATEMENT: At C-day, H-hour, the division deploys by air and sea. It occupies the assigned assembly areas and organizes for combat. On order, it conducts an amphibious landing, prepares to establish blocking positions, or prepares to assume the sector of another unit.

DIVISION MISSION-ESSENTIAL TASK
MET 1   Conduct amphibious operations.

Tank Battalion Mission-Essential Task:
Conduct Assault Landing
MPS 10A1.3   Command group operations.
MPS 10A2.1   Perform intelligence operations.
MPS 10A3.4   Move tactically.
MPS 10A3.7   Assault.
MPS 10A3.8   Attack/counterattack by fire.
MPS 10A3.9   Defend.
MPS 10A4.1   Employ fire support.
MPS 10A7   React to NBC attacks.
MPS 10A9.3   Conduct assault landing.
MPS 10A9.5   Conduct amphibious withdrawal.

Infantry Battalion Mission-Essential Task:
Execute Amphibious Assault
MPS 2A1.1   Conduct amphibious staff planning.
MPS 2A1.3   Conduct assault landing.
MPS 2A1.5   Conduct amphibious withdrawal.
MPS 2A5.2   Provide logistical support.
MPS 2A7.6   Conduct fire support coordination ashore.
MPS 2A9.13   Defend against mines and boobytraps.
MPS 2A10.10 Conduct a heliborne assault.
MPS 2A10.13 Conduct tank-infantry attack.
MPS 2A10.16 Conduct a mechanized attack supported by tanks.

Figure 5-2. Example of a Division
Mission-Essential Task With Subordinate Unit MPSs.

After the commander designates the collective mission-essential tasks required to accomplish the unit's combat mission, the senior SNCOs identify individual tasks that support mission-essential tasks. Training publications, such as *Marine Battle Skills Training Handbooks* and ITSS, are major source documents for selecting appropriate individual tasks.

Training Standards

After mission-essential tasks have been identified, commanders extract supporting conditions and evaluation criteria for each task from the appropriate MCCRES volume to provide clear statements of expected training performance. See figure 4-3, located on pages 4-6 through 4-9, for an example of a battalion-level training standard. The following documents can assist commanders and their staffs in the selection of collective and ITSs that support training for the unit's mission-essential tasks:

MCOs 1510 series (ITSS).
MCOs 3500 series (Training and Readiness [T&R]).
MCOs 3501 series (MCCRES).
MCOs 4790 series (Maintenance Training Management and Eval-uation Program [MATMEP]).

Training Assessment

The training assessment compares the organization's current level of training proficiency with the desired level of combat proficiency. The desired level is defined in training standards within MCCRES volumes, ITSS, and T&R orders.

Evaluation of Proficiency

Leaders determine current training proficiency levels by reviewing all available training evaluations. Each evaluation applies only to a portion of the total proficiency of an organization at a specific time. Therefore, leaders must use all available evaluation data to develop an assessment of the organization's overall capability to accomplish each task in the METL. In addition to past training evaluations, future events could influence the assessment. For example, the projected personnel turnover rate or the fielding of new equipment could significantly affect the commander's assessment of training proficiency status during the upcoming training period. Leaders update the training assessment at the beginning of each long-range and midrange planning cycle and after a major training event or unit deployment program rotation.

The commander uses the broad experience and knowledge of key subordinates to help determine the organization's current proficiency. A division commander may direct key staff members and subordinate commanders to assess the current proficiency of the division's ability to execute mission-essential tasks. At the same time, division and subordinate SNCOs may assess proficiency on individual tasks that support collective tasks. They review available collective and individual evalua- tion information and rely heavily on personal observations.

Then, they compare the unit's current task proficiency with the Marine Corps' standards. The commander uses subordinate leaders' inputs to determine a unit's current proficiency on each task. Current task proficiency is indicated by rating the task as T (trained), P (partially trained/needs practice), U (untrained/unknown). The training requirement is the training necessary to achieve and sustain desired levels of training proficiency for each mission-essential task. Refer to appendix B for an example of commander's assessment of unit standards.

Training Strategy

The commander, assisted by the staff, develops a strategy to accomplish each training requirement. This includes improving proficiency on some tasks and sustaining performance on others. Through the training strategy, the commander establishes training priorities by determining the minimum frequency each mission-essential task will be performed during the upcoming planning period. The strategy also includes broad guidance that links the METL with upcoming exercise schedules. The initial training assessment leads to the commander's guidance that starts the detailed planning process.

The training assessment of each separate mission-essential task enables the commander to develop the unit's training vision. This is the broad concept for training that the unit will use to achieve and sustain combat proficiency. The key elements that shape a commander's training vision are a thorough understanding of training and operations, doctrine, assessment of METL proficiency levels, and knowledge of potential enemy capabilities.

The commander's training vision is supported by organizational goals that provide a common direction for all the commander's programs and systems. Senior leaders involve their staffs and their subordinate commanders in goal development to ensure common understanding and to create an organizational team approach. The following are examples of organizational goals:

Establish and support a command climate conducive to developing a high level of individual, leader, and collective warfighting proficiency (all types of organizations).

Develop and integrate the plans required to field combined-arms, MAGTFs, and joint service teams that can fight and win on the battlefield.