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S-3/WTTS

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To: Commanding Officer, Second Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company

Subj: AFTER ACTION REVIEW (AAR) FOR ANGLICO BASIC COURSE (ABC) 2-13

1. OVERVIEW: This AAR is broken down into three sections. The first is an account of this course’s planning shortfalls. The second section adheres to the traditional Topic/Discussion/Recommendation format. The third is a curated selection of AAR comments from the ABC students.
2. PLANNING SUMMARY: ABC 2-13’s planning process started not with an objective or a requirement, but with a constraint: ‘ABC concurrent with 3-321 FA’s shoot.’ We were never given a mission statement, end state, or similar; there was no conceptual foundation upon which to build the course. As a result, the course was hastily constructed by a small group of people who often had different ideas about not just how to accomplish the task, but even what that task was.

I volunteered to lead the effort in October, when it became apparent that no planning was occurring. I wrote a course which would accomplish the training objectives set forth in the basic Lightning University (LG-U) syllabi. I did most of the external coordination required – what remained awaited action from the instructors who would be accomplishing the training. Where appropriate, I briefed the S-3 and submitted detailed support requests.

The Final Planning Conference (FPC) was scheduled for the morning of 14JAN13. My goal was to finalize coordination, perform troop-to-task, and begin detailed planning of the classes and events. Instead, the FPC turned into an Initial Planning Conference (IPC) based on a totally new set of ideas and opinions. Though I still had responsibility for the results, I lacked the authority to make the necessary decisions.

The LG-U syllibi the course was based on were not used, so the effort of deciding what skills to include in ABC (which drives the rest of the planning effort) was restarted from square one. Further, I soon found out that the range requests and NSTAR that I’d submitted several weeks prior never left ANGLIOC S-3.

We had done more than just start from scratch on the schedule; six working days away from execution, we were creating a brand new vision for the course with almost zero support locked on. The next few days were spent hashing out a schedule based on the new approach. During the time when we would have otherwise been rehearsing classes and conducting detailed coordination/rehearsals, we were instead putting the basic building blocks of the course together.

As a result, the actual training delivered was largely unrehearsed and seldom planned in detail. The need to execute *something, right now* trumped the need to plan or coordinate support. Execution became a juggling act where balls were dropped both by accident and on purpose in order to keep the most important elements from being lost.

This course also suffered from lack of interest in participation. Personnel who should[[1]](#footnote-1) have been in the course were instead at various schools, appointments, standing duty (MHG and ANGLICO ADNCO), or simply absent for reasons I still do not understand. About half of the ‘final’ roster of 38 Marines attended any part of the course; FINEX started with only 16 ANGLICO Marines. When one considers the total cost to the command, FINEX (and arguably, ABC as a whole) certainly did not provide an acceptable return on the resources invested. Had more Marines been in the course, this would not have been the case.

1. Topic: What is the ANGLICO Basic Course?

Discussion: This question needs to be answered before any planning for future ABCs begin. The answer needs to come in the form of mission statement, end state, commander’s intent, and commander’s guidance.

Recommendation: I recommend the following mission statement as a starting point for discussion and dialogue:

The ANGLICO Basic Course (ABC) is an immersive training program designed to familiarize newly joined ANGLICO Marines with the basic skills and concepts required for Firepower Control Team operations. ABC trains Marines (of all ranks and MOS) in basic-level T&R training in the areas of communications, firepower control, infantry skills, and ANGLICO’s liaison mission. ABC is designed to enhance esprit de corps and unit pride by physically challenging Marines and placing them in situations which allow the command’s leadership to develop an appreciation for an individual Marine’s current and potential abilities, in order to facilitate informed manning decisions.

1. Topic: Planning for Future ABCs

Discussion: See Above.

Recommendations: Create a Plan of Objectives and Milestones (POA&M) for every ABC. Hold an IPC 6 months out to determine course dates, core cadre members, mission statement, course objectives. When Marines check into the command, put them on notice for the next iteration of ABC – keep their schedules clear.

1. Topic: Re-establishing ABC as part of our institutional memory.

Discussion: Since re-activation, almost every commanding officer has held a single ABC. Each varied significantly, and what should have been lessons learned turned into patterns of failure. Every time, planners have had to ‘re-invent the wheel.’

Recommendation: Determine at what interval ABCs should be held. They need to be frequent enough that it takes place relatively soon after Marines join the command, but not so frequently that benefit of the training (#s trained) is not worth the cost.

Using rough numbers (200 Marines, 3 year tours) we get about 6 new Marines per month. If we run this course twice per year, that’s a class of 36 Marines – an ideal size.

1. Topic: Who should attend ABC?

Discussion: This iteration of ABC had zero SNCOs or officers, and few of the available HQ personnel who recently joined the command. This resulted in lost training opportunities for these Marines, as well as reduced value for the Marines who were in the course. We had only one full-time Sergeant in the course, and two Corporals. This is the result of an attitude summed up as “ABC is Basic. Basic is for PFCs and LCpls.”

Recommendation: Everyone needs to attend ABC: every officer, every SNCO, and every headquarters Marine. This recommendation includes commanders and Sergeants Major. Of course, such personnel will not be able to attend every event, but they should still be ‘enrolled.’ Their presence will improve the course, and it will flatten their own learning curve as well.

Push the narrative that “ABC is basic, and professionals at every level need to practice brilliance in the basics.” Even if basic skills are already mastered (and they usually aren’t), ABC is a great opportunity for a seasoned Marines to pass their knowledge on to younger Marines, and prove that they are indeed masters of their craft.

1. Topic: Schedule ABC to accommodate Marines with a ‘day job.’

Discussion: This bullet dovetails with the previous one. It’s unrealistic to ask some of the company’s most critical support players to take 3+ weeks off, while still at CLNC. We need to create a structure that allows them to take part, but still get their jobs done.

Recommendation: Create white space and ‘nice-to-have’ classes during the syllabus to give support players windows to do their ‘day jobs.’ Treat the course as a formal school or a DFT where their absence is expected and allowed for. Extend the schedule to 4 weeks if need be. This was done during ABC in February of 2010, and it worked well. Mornings were compulsory, but many afternoons were not.

1. Topic: What should be taught at ABC?

Discussion: It is vital that we establish a consistent syllabus that provides continuity during a Marine’s time at ANGLICO as well as between ‘generations’ of ANGLICO Marines.

Recommendation: Make the LG-U basic syllabi the backbone of the course. The T&R manual on its own is not sufficient – if one attempts to put every code into a ‘basic’ course, the course is no longer ‘basic.’ We need to chunk the T&R into skill levels - This is the exact purpose of the LG-U syllibi. The Standardization Board needs to decide what skill goes where on the continuum and forward that recommendation to the CO for signature. Until we embrace this concept, will be unable to schedule training based on a systematic understanding of who-needs-what. Instead, we will continue to use a best-guess estimate of what needs to be trained, and execute one-size-fits-some training.

1. Topic: Logistical Support

Discussion: 2d ANGLICO S-4 was constantly ahead of the operations side of the house. They didn’t need direct tasking; they frequently anticipated and filled requirements based on their understanding of what was going on. Even with the Log-O at Basic Airborne Course, the one part of the course we never had to worry about was logistics.

Recommendation: Commend the S-4’s great work – it left absolutely zero to be desired.

1. Selected/Curated ABC Student AAR Comments:

**What where the top three most effective classes and why?**

CQB:  “captured their attention.”

Crypto

CFF Sims: “Non 0861 Marines were adamant about the importance of this class

This exercise really brought home all the points made in the class.”

**What where the 3 least effective classes and why?**

Naval guns

CASEVAC: “This topic was a bit contested but most Marines felt that maybe some more practical application would have been worthwhile especially including LZ brief.”

6 Functions of Aviation: “Most of the students felt that they didn't get much from the class since they didn't understand how it applied to them.“

**What is the #1 thing that needs to be improved?**

“All the Marines agreed that they would like all the classes to be kept together and having them streamlined from one into another. For example starting with basic radio programming, doing practical application, then going into crypto and so on, without having another class in between that block. That would keep them from forgetting basic knowledge when having

to learn more advanced procedures a few days later.”

“The Marines felt very strongly about the establishment of FCTs early on and not changing them for the remainder of the course in order to develop team TTPs, cohesion etc.”

**The one thing the Marines would keep above all in ABC?**

“Everyone enjoyed the CAS demonstration and felt that seeing it being called in live along with CAPT. Wright's method of teaching, helped them all understand the process a lot better.”

**Individual Input:**

LCpl Long:  “I feel that during the FINEX the teams need to take the stations more seriously.”

LCpl Ramirez: “The amount of Hiking/Humping was just enough to push me past my comfort zone. Getting comm was pretty hard so I really had to think of everything to fix it, which was also good for me.”

LCpl Davis: The duty "situation" should have been mitigated especially with fore knowledge that it was coming. That way if people wanted to try and skate out of stuff they couldn't use duty to get out of it.

LCpl Schmidt: “Marines that have been in the unit for over a year and have learned the majority should either be exempt or be able to test out of the course.”

LCpl Robison:  “I thought getting the chance to go out to the OPs and see how the FDC along with gun crew operate really helped in my in my understanding of the bigger picture when it comes to artillery.”

LCpl Jones: “Some classes I felt where pointless and others should

be more in depth. The FINEX was awesome especially the zodiacs, it should of been overnight.”

LCpl Bohannon: “I thought this course was fun and the way the CAPT Wright skipped through the classes and highlighted just the main points, and then after the class would have a group discussion was great for me because it helped me put everything into a better perspective that I could understand. I could literally listen and talk about CAS and Arti all day long.”

LCpl Soto: “I personally didn't learn anything from the Comm. classes but I am at least more confident in my RO skills. I still don't understand

crypto that well, I know how to load it but I don't know what to load for what and when. [During FINEX,] Ramirez and myself did all the Comm stations and Whitney and Davis did the FO stations. That didn't prove we all knew the stuff that is required.”

LCpl Shaffer: “I learned a lot about how my gear should work for me and being comfortable at the same time.”

LCpl Salazar: “...It also helped me as a person to work on patience with those whose skills and strength wasn't what others were. It also showed how much there is that I don’t know about my job.”

Sgt Pitigoi: “Personally a lot of the course was review but I feel that even for someone with a little experience in everything, that fundamentally already knows the material and has applied it in different situations, this course is still good because all these tools are perishable, and courses like this help you master what you already know, and learn more of what you don't. Some of the things I really enjoyed about this course were watching live CFF, CAS, and going to the gun line. If it would be possible to do life CFF during the course that would be awesome, if not just watching is also very useful. The last thing I will hit on, to keep this short, was the issues we had

with Marines in the course getting duty…”

1. This demographic was never defined. I used the razor of ‘all personnel who joined the command after 4/20/12, and did not make the last deployment.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)