

JOINT STATEMENT OF
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AND
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UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL
ON 24 FEBRUARY 1999
CONCERNING RECRUITING AND RETENTION

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee:

Major General Parks and I are pleased to appear before you today to discuss recruiting and retention. As we move into the 21st century, these two issues have become crucial to the future of your Marine Corps. Finding and keeping the right people is fundamental to our capability as a force in readiness.

RECRUITING

The Marine Corps Recruiting Command (MCRC) has a simple mission: to access young men and women to serve as United States Marines, and to perform other tasks as directed by the Commandant. This mission has implied tasks: first, we must accomplish that mission while maintaining our quality standards; secondly, we must take care of our people; and thirdly, we must make recruiting a sought after, career enhancing assignment. Over the past several years we have made significant progress in each area.

We have continued to attract quality young men and women of character in sufficient quantities to achieve Marine Corps accession requirements. Fiscal year 1998 was another successful year for Marine Corps recruiting. We achieved or exceeded all missions and quality standards for both officers and enlisted Marines, attaining 100% of our contracting goal and 100.1% of our accession requirement. Upper mental group categories on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) made up 63.7% of our recruits, compared to the DOD standard of 60% and Marine Corps standard of 63%. Similarly, 95.9% of our recruits are Tier I high school graduates, that is, traditional accredited diploma holders, compared to the DOD standard of 90% and the Marine Corps standard of 95%.

FY99 Update

We have continued our record of enlisted recruiting success into FY99. Through January we met 101.3% of our accession goal, and 101.5% of our contracting goal. In addition, we have exceeded DOD quality standards of 90% Tier 1s and 60% I-IIAs during this period. MCRC is maintaining contracting rates higher than the Marine Corps' stated goals in both categories and, in conjunction with a strong quality summer pool, will meet the 95% Tier I and 63% I-IIA requirements by the end of FY99.

Future Outlook

Looking ahead, we see accessions increasing by approximately 1,000 next fiscal year for non-prior service regulars. This increase in non-prior service regular mission establishes the level of accessions MCRC must recruit on average through FY03. Total officer accession requirements will remain stable at approximately 1375 commissions per year.

Recruiting will remain increasingly difficult in the foreseeable future not only due to these increased accessions, but also because we face keen competition within the available market of qualified and available young men and women. That market, which grows only slightly over the next couple of years, is characterized by increased college attendance and a strong economy marked by record high employment in the private sector. However, negative sociological trends such as broken families and lack of physical fitness are problematic areas that negatively affect the national pool of available young people. In combination, these market characteristics make it more difficult to find and enlist well-qualified applicants. Nevertheless, with adequate resources and quality leadership, we will sustain our established record of recruiting success.

Recruiter Quality of Life

The quality of life of our recruiters remains a concern. The most recent DOD-Wide recruiter surveys describe a work environment unlike any other peacetime assignment. The recruiting workplace is characterized by long work weeks, very little quality time with family members, and lack of those support mechanisms normally available to service members assigned aboard installations and bases. To this is added the imposing psychological stress of the unrelenting month-by-month pressure of being on "quota," where one's performance can constantly be measured by quantitative standards of production. Thus, recruiting duty presents a challenging assignment under demanding conditions, with the ever-present potential risk of failure. As with the other Services, these especially demanding conditions are circumstances unfamiliar to most Marines and are not necessarily assignments conducive to casual volunteerism.

Four quality of life issues are consistently identified by our recruiters as major concerns: affordable housing, access to medical care, spousal employment opportunities, and childcare. To address these concerns, MCRC's Human Resource Section was created three years ago to focus on improving the quality of life for our recruiters and their families.

The Marine Corps and MCRC are making progress in many areas to provide a better quality of life and make recruiting duty a more sought-after assignment. Since its establishment, MCRC's Human Resource Section has developed an effective Key Volunteer Network, and initiated a sponsorship program for those Marines and families newly assigned to this duty. We have also established, along with other Services, an agreement titled "Project Home Base" to support independent duty service personnel at all local bases and installations. We further created a

MCRC Set-Aside Housing Program that allows our recruiting commanders to work with civilian landlords to reserve equitable housing in the civilian sector.

We continue to pursue initiatives to satisfy the basic needs of our personnel. These needs include the availability of reasonable, high quality medical and dental care for Marines and their dependents, childcare subsidies, legal assistance, educational videos, and booklets to prepare Marines and their families for the rigors of recruiting duty.

We seek the highest quality officer and enlisted Marines available for this most demanding duty. An extensive screening and evaluation process produces singularly qualified recruiters for our six districts. Forty-three consecutive months of mission accomplishment by the recruiting command reflects the effectiveness of this system.

The Marine Corps recognizes the hard work, sacrifice, and contributions of its recruiters, nation-wide. We have implemented a comprehensive incentives program that recognizes and rewards our successful recruiters for their achievements. We promote our best recruiters meritoriously, even to higher staff noncommissioned officer ranks. Regular promotion boards are given guidance to consider any Marine with a successful recruiting tour as “highly qualified.” Through guaranteed assignment to career level school for our company grade officers and intermediate level school for our recruiting station commanders, we are making recruiting a career enhancing assignment.

Resources

Marine Corps recruiting remains very lean in resources. We maintain a ratio of one support person for every three recruiters. At present, the funding levels allocated for all bonus programs and the Marine Corps College Fund (MCCF) Program provides our recruiters with approximately

one bonus program for each recruiter and just three MCCF Programs for every four recruiters to use as enlistment tools each year.

Our advertising budget is very sparse in today's climate, so that our program is subjected to unending scrutiny to ensure that it remains cost effective and responsive. Our award winning advertising program is not only aimed at increasing awareness, but is also fully integrated in a marketing program that spans the entire recruiting spectrum. From individual incentive items to Internet banners to "Extreme Games" sports sponsorship, we attempt to achieve a synergy of effort that relays a consistent message that Marines are tough, smart, and elite. We believe that this message resonates with a significant element of today's youth market; the ones seeking challenge, self-discipline, and strength of character.

Conclusion

MCRC will continue to achieve all accession and quality requirements as long as appropriate resources are made available. Your continued support will ensure the Marine Corps continues to fulfill its legacy to this great country. Through a Marine Corps experience, your Corps returns better citizens to society--transformed Americans enriched by our ethos, ideals, and core values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment. For us, recruiting begins a rite of passage that initiates this transformation process, the process that results in "Making Marines" and "Winning Battles."

RETENTION

A successful recruiting effort is just the beginning of the continual process of getting a properly trained Marine to the right place at the right time. This is a dynamic process which requires us to match a Marine's MOS and grade to the needs of Commanders throughout the

Corps. Stable and predictable retention patterns are a critical link that enables this process to work smoothly and efficiently. Successful retention, in turn, is what keeps the Corps the most ready when the nation is least ready.

Enlisted

Our current enlisted retention situation is stable; that is, we are experiencing first, second, and third term reenlistment rates that are close to our historical norms. I am cautious, however, about the predictability of those rates. As other Services are experiencing significant declines in retention, and the civilian sector continues to offer enticing alternatives, the pressure on our Marines to leave the Corps will continue to increase. We are already experiencing shortages in certain high tech MOSs that are in demand in the civilian sector.

First Term

In FY98, 21.6% of our eligible first term Marines reenlisted into the career force. While this rate appears low, it represents 100% of our first term reenlistment goal. Every year, we set a precise goal on the number of first term reenlistments necessary to maintain a viable career force. In each of the last five years, we have achieved that goal. FY99 presents a new challenge, as we have significantly increased the number of allocations available, from 4,600 in FY98 to 5,400 in FY99. Achieving this new level is critical to the health of our career force.

Career Force

For many years, once Marines reenlisted the first time they were generally assumed to be staying until 20 years. We are transitioning to an era where the Marine destined for retirement

cannot be identified until after the second or even third reenlistment. Since our career force is particularly small (almost 70 percent of all enlisted Marines are in the *first* term) it is paramount to retain our highest quality career Marines. Therefore, we do not establish limits on the annual number of career force reenlistments.

Career force retention in FY98 was very close to our average; however, maintaining these retention levels is becoming increasingly difficult. Despite overall attainment of retention objectives, we are experiencing minor unanticipated decreases in the continuation patterns of some career Marines, particularly at the second reenlistment. This has resulted in shortages within certain specific MOSs. Generally, these shortages occur in technical skills or skills that readily transfer to the civilian sector. This results in extended tours for some Marines and unfilled personnel requirements. Despite these skill shortages, we are still able to mitigate the impacts on near-term readiness, since other Marines are committed to working harder and longer to accomplish the mission. This situation can only become more burdensome over time unless we do everything possible to retain more Marines with these particular skills.

Current Efforts

One of the Corps enduring mottoes is “Every Marine is a Rifleman.” Our Recruiting Command has expanded on this theme, and we now institutionally acknowledge that “Every Marine is a Recruiter.” We are now beginning to realize that every Marine is also a career planner. That is, Marine leaders at every level have a tremendous influence on the retention decision of subordinates. As I will address shortly, compensation is a critical element in the retention equation. But make no mistake about it, the driving force behind retention is intangible. Marines are inspired by challenging and realistic training; by shared hardships; by accomplishment

of meaningful missions; and by the camaraderie of the brotherhood of arms. Coupled with the personal growth derived from professional schooling and positions of responsibility, these intangibles are the cornerstone of every reenlistment decision.

Among the tangible features, the Selective Reenlistment Bonus (SRB) program offers a valuable tool for addressing our retention concerns. Historically, we have focused our SRB incentives almost exclusively on our first term Marines. We have now shifted much of the focus to Marines at the second reenlistment, despite a growing first term reenlistment requirement. While we have planned substantial increases to our SRB funding, this tool by itself is not robust enough to counter the growing perception that military benefits are eroding too far, too fast.

Officers

We are enjoying moderate success in our officer career force management. The officer attrition rate for Fiscal Year 1998 was 9.4%. While this is a decrease from Fiscal Year 1997's rate of 9.6%, it is still higher than we would like to see. As with the enlisted force, we have skill imbalances within our officer corps. These shortages are the result of higher attrition in fixed-wing aviation MOSs and some ground MOSs. Since FY96, we have averaged nearly 100 aviator resignations per year (vice a FY85-FY96 average of 35), and expect to reach that level again this year.

In the ground MOSs, we have managed these skill shortages within acceptable levels by using promotion and augmentation board precept guidance. Additionally, we have begun a new Supplementary MOS program designed to improve retention among junior officers and provide flexibility in staffing short MOSs.

In the case of aviation, we continue to offer financial incentives (Aviation Continuation Pay) to all communities. Despite our higher fixed-wing aviator resignation rates, we are still capable of meeting all of our cockpit requirements. While we will continue to fill every cockpit with a quality aviator, we will likely have difficulty in meeting our combined cockpit and non-cockpit aviator requirements needed to develop well-rounded Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) officers over the next several years.

Retention Survey

The Marine Corps has not used a reliable and valid exit survey for a number of years now. However, in an effort to quantify why Marines decide to exit or remain in the Corps, we have developed a thorough, comprehensive exit and retention survey. It will be implemented initially in the spring of 1999, and will provide valuable insight into the attitudes and opinions that shape Marines' retention decisions.

Compensation

Until service members believe their pay is commensurate with their civilian counterparts, they will continue to "vote with their feet." Of course, money alone won't keep Marines in the Corps. They stay primarily because of the deep attachments developed for the institution and for fellow Marines. But inadequate pay can quickly become a source of tension and dissatisfaction. After all, we have an all *recruited* force, as opposed to an all volunteer force. Attracting and retaining Marines is a continual struggle, met with success only by the Herculean efforts of our recruiters and leaders throughout the Corps. Without pay that is perceived as fair and equitable, we present our recruiters and leaders with a nearly insurmountable challenge.

Retirement

Despite a lack of hard data, anecdotal evidence points strongly to retirement as a major dissatisfier among Marines making career choices. For the first time, Marines who fall under the Redux retirement plan are making career decisions. Mid-career officers between the 8 and 12 years of service and enlisted at the second and third reenlistment mark are most often married. They confront civilian job opportunities that offer a higher quality of life for their families. Many of our best NCOs and officers are deciding that continued military service is not as financially appealing as it was under previous retirement plans. Exacerbating the problem is the fact that many of mid-career Marines deciding their futures work next to fellow Marines that are covered under more lucrative retirement plans. Unfortunately, Redux is perceived as a disincentive to remain in the Marine Corps rather than an incentive. Although Redux benefits increase by 3.5 percent for each year served beyond 20, this advantage is mostly lost on Marines who are focusing on 40 percent instead of 50 percent retired pay at twenty years.

Retention is a complex issue. As mentioned earlier, retirement provisions are not the only consideration in the stay or leave decision. However, the break away from the historical 50% retirement plan conveys a message to our Marines that the Nation does not appreciate their many sacrifices. The resulting negative impact on force retention then affects the stability of our officer and enlisted middle grade leadership. Readiness will eventually suffer when more experienced personnel leaving for the civilian job market are replaced by new, less experienced Marines.

Addressing the retirement issue now will impact those Marines currently considering departure from the military service. But restoring retirement benefits isn't just about present retention. Future mid-career Marines will also agonize over the same issue if it is not resolved.

The positive effects of today's decisive action will be felt in our Armed Forces for the foreseeable future.

Basic Pay

In addition to restoring retirement benefits, the military-civilian pay gap must be addressed. While there is still some disagreement as to the size and scope of the pay gap, there can be no question that the systematic process of widening the gap (through ECI-.5%) is wrong. Our Marines appreciate Congress' attention to this issue in the current budget. Congressional support for this goal is clearly evidenced in the 3.6 percent pay increase for 1999. Planned increases for the future, as reflected in the FY00 President's Budget, are significant steps that will aid considerably in our retention efforts.

Closely related to closing the pay gap is pay table reform. The current pay table reveals numerous inconsistencies and inequities, and it tends to overemphasize the value of longevity as it relates to pay raises. The table should be modified to reflect logical, progressive pay differences between successive ranks. It should reflect more balance between "pay for performance" and longevity system by targeting pay raises more for promotion than longevity.

A new proposed pay table to be implemented on 1 July 2000 would correct these discrepancies. Military members will receive higher pay raises when they are promoted, rewarding their outstanding performance. I agree with Secretary Cohen's assessment that "this change will reward performance, compensate people for their skills and experience and encourage them to continue their service."

Closing

Military service, particularly in the Marine Corps, is much more than a source of pay. Our history is filled with the heroic deeds of Marines who were responding to something far deeper and far more inspirational than mere compensation. Today Marines remain excited and proud of what they are doing. They are proud of the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor. However, while sufficient pay can never guarantee success in battle, lack of sufficient pay, over time, will inevitably degrade our fighting edge. Addressing the most important pay and retirement concerns now will pay dividends for the Nation in the form of a capable and responsive force for the future.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to answering your questions about the Corps.