

The Marine Corps Infantry Reserves:

Supporting or Supported?

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EWS

Major Bragg

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I. Introduction

The total force readiness of the Marine Corps will never be obtained, or sustained, as long as the criteria for assigning junior leadership billets (platoon commanders, company executive officers) in the Reserve Component (RC) infantry regiments is based on rank and not on Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). A Marine leader, regardless of whether he or she is serving in the Active Component (AC) or RC, must be trained in and be a duty expert in his or her assigned MOS. The Marine Corps cannot expect the RC to accomplish its mission requirements successfully if its assigned leaders do not possess the fundamental skills and formal training necessary to do the job. Assigning an officer to an MOS billet for which he or she is neither formally trained, nor experienced is a recipe for failure, especially in the reserve infantry regiments.

Instead, the United States Marine Corps should employ active duty junior infantry officers (lieutenants / captains) as reserve platoon commanders to improve the total force readiness of the Reserve Infantry Regiments.

II. Current Situation

a. Description

According to the *Marine Corps Reserve Administrative Management Manual* (MCRAAM), when an officer joins a reserve unit the goal is "to assign officers of correct billet grade to the greatest extent possible."¹ The MCRAMM further states, "All officers should possess the requisite MOS associated with their specific T/O billet line number. If an officer does not possess the appropriate MOS, the commander will take appropriate action to qualify the officer in the MOS within 18 months."² Regardless of his background, Marine officers who transition from the AC to the RC can be and are being assigned to billets outside their primary MOS.

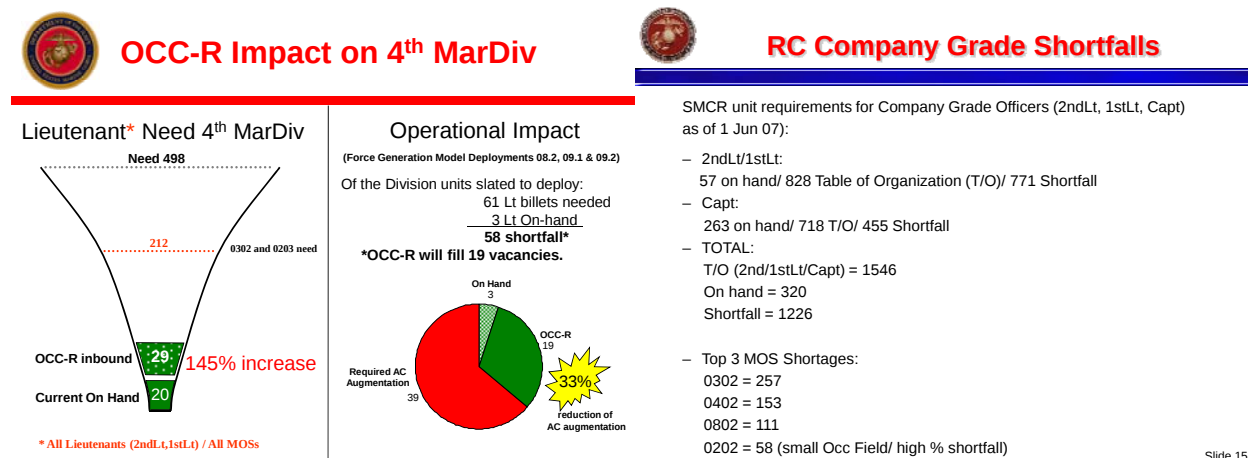
According to an officer accession study conducted by Manpower and Reserve Affairs Plans and Policy Branch in October 2007, a shortage of 257 company grade infantry officers exists in the RC (see figure 1)³. As a direct result of this shortfall, platoon commander and executive officer billets remain vacant for several months or years. The temporary solution for

¹ Marine Corps Reserve Administrative Management Manual, 10 March 1999, <[http://www.usmc.mil/directiv.nsf/0dce83e13c9c8aa685256c0c0066c2e0/d67e86145fe8baab8525680f00562f7f/\\$FILE/MCO%20P1001R.1J.pdf](http://www.usmc.mil/directiv.nsf/0dce83e13c9c8aa685256c0c0066c2e0/d67e86145fe8baab8525680f00562f7f/$FILE/MCO%20P1001R.1J.pdf)> (2 January 2008)

² Marine Corps Reserve Administrative Manual

³ Manpower & Reserve Affairs,

providing leadership in the vacant commissioned officer billets has been to assign reserve warrant officers and staff non-commissioned officers (SNCOs) to these crucial leadership billets.



(Figure 1)

Since late 2005, however infantry reserve units that deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), have been augmented by (39) active duty junior infantry officers.⁴ The active duty individual augments (IAs) assigned to these units, serving as platoon commanders and executive officers, are pulled from either their first duty assignments or their B-billetts. The use of active duty IAs remains the current practice for filling the required infantry officer shortfalls for deploying reserve infantry battalions.

⁴ Interview with Maj Nelson, Manpower & Reserve Affairs



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4th MARDIV
Infantry Battalion Order of March



Unit	Next OIF Rotation	Resulting Dwell at Reactivation
3/23	06-08.2	48 mos
2/24	FY-08.1	36 mos
2/25	FY-08.2	61 mos
2/23	FY-09.1	70 mos
3/24	FY-09.2	60 mos
3/25	FY-10.1	54 mos
1/23	FY-10.2	66 mos
1/25	FY-11.1	54 mos
1/24	FY-11.2	54 mos
3/23	FY-12.1	36 mos

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(ENCLOSURE 1)

b. Problems

The problems associated with assigning unqualified reserve officers to billets in the RC, are too numerous to be listed. These problems, however, are compounded by scheduling conflicts. The MCRAMM states that the commanding officer must have that officer trained within 18 months; however, a reserve infantry unit, scheduled to deploy, may not have the time to send that officer to a formal school like the Infantry Officers Course (IOC)⁵ due to the training and operational commitments. Furthermore, the officer's civilian job may conflict with the time required to attend a formal training school. Lastly, school schedules may conflict with the commanding officer's plan to send Marine officers to MOS schools, thus preventing that unqualified officer from receiving the proper training.

⁵ IOC Mission Statement

Deployment timing, job confliction, and school schedules decrease the probability that the reserve officer will receive the proper training to lead in an infantry billet.

Temporarily assigning infantry SNCOs and warrant officers to commissioned officer billets in a unit is necessary to provide experienced leadership in the unit. However, temporary fills are of shorter duration because active infantry units have personnel slating priority when officer shortfalls are identified. The reserve infantry regiments do not have a priority unless that unit is scheduled to deploy. Furthermore, a reserve infantry regiment must wait for qualified infantry officers to transition from the AC to RC to fill the billet gaps.

Moreover, the use of junior active duty infantry officers to augment the RC contradicts what is stated in the mission of the Marine Reserve Forces: "The Reserves provide individuals and specific units to augment and reinforce active capabilities."⁶ Under the current practice of sending individual augments from the AC to the RC, to meet deployment requirements, the supported unit (AC) is acting as the supporting unit to the RC.

⁶ Marine Corps Reserve Administrative Manual

III. Proposal

The Marine Corps can provide a long-term solution to the officer shortfalls and unit readiness in the infantry reserve regiments by assigning active duty officers to those units: The Marine Corps can source the required officers by assigning second lieutenant cohorts graduating from the Infantry Officer Course (IOC) and by making the infantry reserve regiments B-billet options for infantry first lieutenants and junior captains.

An infantry officer who is assigned to a Reserve battalion will stay current in his MOS and reduce the risk of degrading perishable skills lost during the time spent away from the AC infantry community. The retention of these skills and the experiences gained from training with a reserve battalion will send an equally qualified officer back to the AC upon the completion of his tour.

Furthermore, an active duty infantry officer, who remains at the unit when drill weekends end, can use the time between drills to plan and develop realistic training packages for his unit. His long-term assignment will allow that officer to identify the strengths and weaknesses of his platoon and to shape the training to correct the Marines' deficiencies. An active duty infantry officer will not be distracted by a

civilian job; therefore, the time and energy required coordinating with other agencies for ranges and training areas will not be a burden. The junior officer can work with the active duty inspector and instructor (I&I)⁷ to ensure the training goals for the platoon/company are nested within the battalion. Realistic training, combined with the expertise the junior infantry officer possesses, will reduce the amount of time necessary to meet all training goals during intermediate location (ILOC) training prior to a unit deploying.

Furthermore, administrative matters are often overlooked in an infantry unit. These issues can, and do, become distractions for units when activated for a deployment. According to Mark Cancian, "Because mobilization is so administratively intense, units should consider augmenting their administration sections on mobilization. Even small detachments should consider bringing an administrative specialist."⁸ The active duty junior officer could act as the administrative specialist, ensuring all fitness reports, wills, powers of attorney, promotions, etc..., are completed by his Marines and properly tracked until completion. When problems with administrative matters are identified, the

⁷ Marine Corps Reserve Administrative Manual

⁸ Cancian, Mark F. and Paul V. Kane. "Marine Corps Reserve Forces in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM." *Marine Corps Gazette* Quantico, Va. Vol. 88 7 (2004 Jul): 50-57.

active duty officer can contact the Marine and have the matter resolved. The reserve Marines and their leaders will not have to wait for drill weekends or, even worse, to an activation to learn that administrative issues must be resolved.

Moreover, proper evaluation of and mentoring of the Marine Corps' SNCOs and NCOs is critical for the development of that individual Marine and the overall readiness of the unit he is assigned to lead. Active duty infantry officers, who remain with a unit for two to three years, can observe the senior NCO and SNCOs, to ensure he executes accurate and well-documented evaluations for that Marine. SNCOs and warrant officers who hold those billets, and who constantly rotate, cannot properly evaluate their Marines. Poorly documented and/or short term evaluations may result in Marines being passed up for promotion or, worse, being promoted when not prepared for the greater responsibilities.

Further, when an active duty infantry officer is assigned to an infantry reserve unit, commanding officers receive a school trained, MOS qualified officer. No longer do they have to worry about having to send the officer to the required formal school for MOS qualification within the 18 month period. He arrives with the skills and training and can focus on training his Marines.

Furthermore, active duty junior infantry officers who have been through formal training and have experiences in the operating forces, can be useful in recruiting potential reserve officers into the Marine Corps. A possibility is to require the officer to spend x number of hours a week, between drill weekends, visiting colleges in the area, getting the Marine Corps image out to the public. This, of course, would be a secondary mission, with no quota requirements, so as not to interfere with the officer's primary responsibility, taking care of his Marines.

c. Counter-arguments

Some opponents suggest that assigning active duty second lieutenants to reserve units will hurt those junior officers competitiveness for promotion and prevent them from enhancing their core skills.

This issue was addressed in the 2005 Marine Corps Reserve Policy Board Issues. The recommendation from the board members is as follows:

"Propose that all promotion, command screening and school seat selection boards include an instruction as part of the board's precept that service in Reserve units shall be given the same credit for professional

experience that would be accorded to an identical billet in an active duty unit. Further, MMOA should provide a briefing to each statutory board on the qualifications, expectations, and process used to select an officer for independent duty.”⁹

An assignment to a reserve unit will make these Marines more competitive because serving in a reserve unit is considered an independent duty. Additionally, the officer will be evaluated and screened for promotion in the same manner as his peers serving in an AC unit.

Others contend the Marine Corps cannot afford to lose active duty infantry officers being assigned either to B-billets such as recruiting, the recruit depots, and MSG, or active duty battalions.

Of the 39 infantry officers who have been assigned to an IA since 2005, all have come from one of the previously mentioned units, all active duty units. Therefore, the argument that their absence hurt their AC units is false. The units that provided these officers were able to continue meeting their assigned missions, despite their losses of officers.

⁹ 2005 Marine Corps Reserve Policy Board (MCRPB) Issues, 2005 <<http://www.donhq.navy.mil/nnrpb/HomeMCRPB.htm>>, (5 January 2008)

IV. Conclusion

The problem of junior infantry officer shortfalls in the RC is not new. In fact, officer shortfalls in the infantry RC have been identified since reserve infantry battalions started deploying in support of OIF in 2003. The solution has been to wait until the unit is activated to assign the appropriate junior infantry officers, most often in the form of an IAs, to the required billets.

This is a temporary solution, with no long term or permanent solution. The permanent solution is to assign active duty junior infantry officers to the RC infantry regiments, so that reserve enlisted Marines, who are expected to risk their lives in combat, have the proper leadership prior to, during, and after a deployment.

Word Count: 1,792

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