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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Contracting Officers in the Marine Corps: It's Time for a Primary MOS

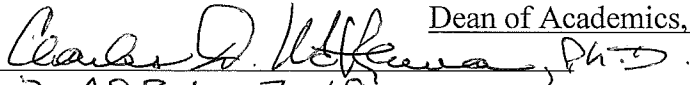
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: Contracting Officers in the Marine Corps: It is Time for a Primary MOS

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Thesis: Without changes to officer retention, training, and career progression for Contracting Officers at the field grade level, the Marine Corps will be unable to meet the enduring requirements of providing adequate contracting support to the operating forces.

Discussion: The Marine Corps has employed multiple training pipelines for Contracting Officers over the past ten years in order to comply with the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA). Despite the extensive training and education of Contracting Officers in the Marine Corps, the Marine Corps struggles to staff billets for field grade officers. The Marine Corps needs to address the real issue at hand which is talent management. The Marine Corps is spending significant resources to train and educate officers without achieving the desired endstate of providing quality contracting support to the operating forces. Officers are transient in the MOS, and there is often a lack of continuity and gapped billets in critical positions across the Marine Corps. This poses significant risk to the Marine Corps due to the fact that deployed forces often rely significantly on contracted logistical support.

Conclusion: The Marine Corps should establish a Primary MOS for Contracting Officers at the Field Grade Level. This will enable the Marine Corps to adequately train, promote, and retain sufficient numbers of field grade officers who possess the requisite certifications and experience to support the Marine Corps with Operational and Contingency Contracting Support. This will also enable command screening for Critical Acquisition Position billets at the O-5 level to ensure the best qualified officers are selected to lead Contract Activities in the Operating Forces.

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I. INTRODUCTION

During the past decade, the Joint Force has worked to implement lessons learned from operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Most recently, lessons learned from OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM emphasized the importance of integrating Operational Contracting Support into operational planning.¹ The Marine Corps has embraced the concept of Operational Contracting Support (OCS), establishing key billets at the Geographic Combatant Commands, Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC), Marine Expeditionary Forces (MEF), and Marine Logistics Group (MLG). Despite these efforts, the Marine Corps is struggling to retain and promote a cadre of field grade officers to fill these billets. The most significant manpower shortfalls in the community are currently at the Field Grade Officer level. MARADMIN 744/12 established Expeditionary Contracting Platoons under 1st and 2nd MLG to provide more responsive OCS and Contingency Contracting Support to the operating forces.² This realignment from the Regional Contracting Offices to the Operating Forces by Headquarters Marine Corps was designed to address the active duty contracting personnel shortfalls.

In addition to the rank requirements for these billets, there are experience and certification requirements that must be met. Marine officers filling these billets often do not possess the commensurate rank, experience, or certification requirements to adequately perform the duties or meet the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA) requirements associated with these billets. In an effort to train and retain officers to fill these billets for the past decade, the Marine Corps has utilized multiple training pipelines to train and educate commissioned contracting officers from various Military Occupational Specialties (MOS). Despite changes to officer training and selection over the years, the Marine Corps continues to fail to train and retain adequate numbers of contracting officers to support the needs of the

operating forces and meet staffing goals. To further compound the manpower shortfalls, the realignment of the CCF under the operating forces has increased the reliance on active duty officers to supervise and lead the Expeditionary Contracting Platoons (ECP) recently established in the MLG. Due to continuous requirements to support operations and exercises, the Marine Corps has struggled to meet the demand and provide adequate contracting support to the operating forces and staff OCS billets across the MEFs and MARFORs. Without changes to officer retention, training, and career progression for Contracting Officers at the field grade level, the Marine Corps will be unable to meet the enduring requirements of providing adequate contracting support to the operating forces.

II. LESSONS LEARNED

Contract support in the United States Marine Corps Operating Forces can be categorized under two areas, Contingency Contracting Support and Operational Contracting Support. Contingency Contracting Support refers to the action of executing contract actions to procure supplies and services via a signed contractual agreement between a contractor and warranted Contracting Officer (KO). Lessons learned routinely address the importance of contracting support to the operating forces. Operational Contracting Support is the critical link that facilitates the planning and integration of contracted logistical support into logistics plans across the Range of Military Operations (ROMO). Contracted logistical support will continue to provide a key role in the logistical support of the Marine Corps in the 21st century. As a result, the Marine Corps created several OCS billets at the Service Component and MEF levels to address this critical need. However, the Marine Corps has been unable to fully implement and leverage OCS capabilities due to lack of adequate staffing and retention of trained Contracting Officers.

III. TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Contracting Officer Certification requirements are mandated by law by the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA) Title 10 United States Code, Sections 1701-1764, and further referenced in the DoD Instruction 5000 series.³ These requirements are applicable to officers filling 3006 Contracting Officer billets and enlisted Marines with the 3044 Contingency Contracting Specialist MOS. Marines possessing the 3044 MOS may serve as a warranted Contracting Officer (KO) or simply in an OCS capacity in which they plan for and coordinate contracting support for the operating forces. They are eligible to earn the Contracting Officer (KO) title when they have been delegated contracting authority to obligate the government from the Head of Contract Activity (HCA) for the Marine Corps. This distinction must be made between Commissioned Officers serving as Contracting Officers who possess the 3006 MOS and enlisted Marines with the 3044 MOS who are currently serving as warranted KOs. The Contingency Contracting Force for the Marine Corps heavily consists of enlisted Marines possessing the 3044 MOS. Enlisted Marines are authorized to apply for waivers to the DAWIA requirements to possess a Bachelor's degree in order to achieve DAWIA certification, but officers must possess a minimum of 24 business credits and a bachelor's degree. These requirements apply to all uniformed and civilian personnel filling Acquisition Workforce Billets. The changes in recent decades for the services to comply with the DAWIA have created issues for enlisted Marines to receive Contracting Officer warrants if they do not possess bachelor's degrees. This is part of an ongoing effort by the Department of Defense and Congress to professionalize and standardize the Acquisition Workforce (AWF) education and training requirements and applies to all DoD civilians and active duty personnel who are filling designated billets. These requirements are typically non-waiverable.

OCS and contingency contracting support are critical to the sustainment of the operating forces. Joint Publication 3-0 defines OCS as the seventh function of logistics, stating

OCS is the process for obtaining supplies, services, and construction material from commercial sources in support of joint operations. OCS includes the ability to plan, orchestrate, and synchronize the provision of contract support integration, contracting support, and contractor management.⁴

In order to coordinate and plan for contracting support, the Marine Corps needs officers who can serve as both as warranted KOs and coordinate and plan for OCS. This requires extensive experience and certifications in order to be compliant with the DAWIA and possess the relevant experience to be effective in these critical positions. Lessons learned during operations in the 21st century frequently cite contracting support as a key logistics enabler that the DoD struggles with. Multiple Congressional oversight reports, to include the Commission on Wartime Contracting report from 2011, calculated “the total cost of fraud associated with contract support in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2001 to 2011 is estimated to be \$30 billion.”⁵ Fraud cases have driven the emphasis on planning and instruction of OCS fundamentals. The DoD requires trained contracting professionals to ensure DoD personnel are trained and possess the requisite experience to properly supervise contractor performance and ensure that contract requirements are fulfilled. Furthermore, experienced field grade officers are needed to provided leadership of contracting organizations to ensure ethical standards of conduct aren’t violated or violations don’t go unreported or unpunished.

The current lack of experienced and trained Contracting Officers represents a considerable risk to the Operating Forces to provide contracting support. A recent survey of Contracting Officers in the Marine Corps completed in 2016 by Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) students indicated that the biggest sources of risk to the community were a lack of technical proficiency and officer manpower shortfalls.⁶ These issues associated with OCS

personnel are consistent with challenges identified by other services and been the topics of numerous reports and investigations by Congress and the DoD Inspector General over the years.⁷ These personnel shortfalls continue to exist and will impact the Marine Corps unless changes are made to the 3006 Contracting Officer MOS to address the root causes. The personnel shortfalls are most pronounced for Field Grade Officers. A recent review of this year's officer staffing revealed that out of nineteen Field Grade Officer billets that are designated for second tour officers, half are currently unfilled or will be filled by officers straight out of school with no Contingency Contracting experience. Most of these billet vacancies are in key billets such as the Director of a Regional Contracting Office, Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) Contracting Officer, or Marine Logistics Group (MLG) Contracting Officer. The Marine Logistics Group CCO billets represent significant risk because these officers are required to operate a Contract Activity that will execute contracts on behalf of the government and are held to the stringent inspection standards of all Marine Corps Field Contracting Offices. Figure 1 is a 2016 survey conducted by NPS students to poll Contracting Offices on the perceived risks to the Marine Corps Contracting Force. The leading sources of risk to the career field listed in figure 1 were officer manpower shortfalls, officer's technical proficiency, and impermanent officer assignment. These risk factors are all a direct result of the lack of a Primary Contracting MOS.

Critical Vulnerability	Response	Qty	%
a. Impermanent officer assignment	No	5	24%
	Yes	16	76%
b. Officer manpower shortfalls	No	0	0%
	Yes	21	100%
c. Enlisted manpower shortfalls	No	10	48%
	Yes	11	52%
d. GS manpower shortfalls	No	15	71%
	Yes	6	29%
e. Officer's technical proficiency	No	4	19%
	Yes	17	81%
f. Failure of contract administration/oversight	No	11	52%
	Yes	10	48%
g. Lack of customer understanding of the contracting processes	No	5	24%
	Yes	16	76%
h. Systems synchronization for OCONUS to CONUS contracts	No	14	67%
	Yes	7	33%
i. Knowledge of systems usage	No	12	57%
	Yes	9	43%
j. Lost knowledge from retiring contracting personnel	No	10	48%
	Yes	11	52%
k. Other/Comments	Yes	5 responses	
	Reference Chapter V to view responses		

Figure 1. 2016 Survey Results of Risk to Contracting Force

A robust CCF provides the operating forces with flexibility and capability to address shortfalls in fluctuating force structure. Now, more than ever, reductions in military forces have driven the demand for the increased use of contracts to augment the force. Recent joint force experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated the requirement for contracts.⁸ The Joint Force has been forced to assume risk and cut significant active duty logistical capabilities in recent decades. The US Army, a key provider of theater support has transitioned a significant portion of its logistical capabilities to the reserves, which have lengthy lead times for

mobilization. Planning assumptions provide for contracted logistical support that will be capable of addressing these shortfalls in the future. The management of contracted logistics support requires trained and experienced personnel to plan and manage support contracts to sustain the Joint Force. This creates an increased demand for contracted logistical support, which increases the need for Marine Corps Contracting Officers to leverage contracted supplies and services.

As the smallest service within the joint force, the Marine Corps will continue to be a net consumer of logistics from the Joint Force, which is heavily reliant on contracted logistics support, to include the Army's Logistics Civil Augmentation Program (LOGCAP). This reliance on contracted support will continue and the Marine Corps must plan for the use of contracted logistical support for future operations. Contracting support is even more critical to the Marine Corps than the other services due to the expeditionary nature of Marine Corps operations. A Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) or Special Purpose MAGTF (SPAGTF) will often conduct operations ahead of or with limited support from the joint force. This creates a requirement for deployable contingency contracting teams that can deploy with MAGTFs and provide a robust contracting capability to the MAGTF during the initial phases of an operation before Joint Contingency Contracting Offices can be established. Due to the requirements to provide both OCS and Contingency Contracting Support to the operating forces, the Marine Corps is not adequately task organized and staffed to provide adequate contracting support. The recent SPMAGTF deployed to Africa specifically addressed a lack of contracting officers on the ground as a critical logistics shortfall and the risk associated with having to reach back to CONUS based units for contracting support.⁹ Logisticians in the operating forces can provide more flexible and robust logistics support to the MAGTF when they are supported by OCS planners and

Contingency Contracting Officers. This is routinely the case on Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU) and SPMAGTFs.

The frequent changes to the training of Contracting Officers have impacted the retention and training timeline for officers. From 2007-2014, Contracting Officers would acquire the secondary MOS of 3006 Contracting Officer upon assignment to a Contingency Contracting or OCS billet in which they serve as a contracting officer for an initial tour of 36 months. Officers from Combat Service Support (CSS) Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) could apply on an annual basis and typically 5 to 10 would be selected. The target rank was First Lieutenant through Captain. Officers are now screened on the Commandant's Career Level Education Board (CCLEB) or Commandant's Intermediate Level Education Board (CPIB). Training standards are set and maintained by the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA), and in the initial tour, Contracting Officers will typically earn their Level II Certification in Contracting. They are eligible to return to the contracting field for a follow on tour after a tour in their Primary MOS. Since the 3006 MOS is a Necessary MOS under the 3002 Supply MOS, it is critical that field grade officers who have previously completed contracting tours return to fill 3006 billets. This process was previously voluntary and not mandatory. However, recently Manpower Management Officer Assignments (MMOA) has assumed responsibility for staffing these billets and is forcing officers to return to contracting billets. However, even with this change, sufficient numbers of field grade officers with the requisite experience and certifications do not exist to fill these billets. Officers are requested to voluntarily return to the MOS, and the Occupational Field Sponsor does not have the authority to mandate the filling of billets, but can recommend individual Marines to fill key billets. There are no command equivalent or command screened billets to assign individuals to high priority

billets. Furthermore, the filling of contracting officer billets is not a priority for primary MOS monitors. Although the 3006 MOS is a NMOS under the 3002 MOS, officers from the 0402 Logistics Officer MOS are often required fill 3006 billets due to personnel shortfalls. To remain competitive for command and promotion, officers must maintain proficiency and fill key billets within their MOS. By continuing to have the contracting MOS a secondary MOS, the contracting community will continue to compete with an officer's primary MOS without any incentives or increased opportunities for promotion or command.

IV. HISTORY OF TRAINING

In the past decade, four different training pipelines for contracting officers have existed. Contracting Officer training and certification requirements are mandated by DAWIA and the certification and warranting processes are managed by Headquarters Marine Corps Installations and Logistics Contracts Branch (LB) and Marine Corps Systems Command (MARCORSYSCOM). Contracting Officers must meet the prerequisite experience, training, and certification requirements in order to receive delegated contracting authority from HQMC and become a warranted contracting officer. In order to complete a successful tour as a contracting officer, officers must achieve DAWIA Level II Contracting certification by the end of their initial three-year tour and be eligible to serve as an Operational Contracting Support Advisor or warranted Contracting Officer. In a deployed environment, officers may serve as the Chief of the Contracting Office. These billets are all low density and require officers to possess a variety and depth of experience and operate independently with little oversight.

All training pipelines within the past ten years have achieved the desired end state of a DAWIA Level II Contracting Certification after the initial tour. The changes to officer training have been the result of several different schools of thought regarding what is the best versus

minimum training requirements for Contracting Officers. During this time, there has been no enduring formal school for contracting under the Marine Corps' Training and Education Command (TECOM). Oversight for training fell under the cognizance of the Marine Corps' Deputy Commandant for Logistics, Contracts Branch. Initially, officers could attend Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) and receive a Master's Degree in Acquisition and Contracting Management under the Special Education Program (SEP).¹⁰ The completion of the curriculum at NPS was not required to meet the DAWIA Level I or II training requirements for certification. Furthermore, a master's degree in acquisition and contract management is not required to serve as a contracting officer or receive a contracting officer's warrant to sign contracts on behalf of the government. At the completion of NPS, contracting officers would execute PCS orders to a contracting officer billet and serve a three-year tour. Defense Acquisition (DAU) credits the education towards experience requirements for certification, so at the end of the three-year tour, officers would earn their DAWIA Level III Contracting Certification due to DAU equivalencies. This certification is typically required to hold high dollar value contracting officer warrants, serve as the Chief of the Contracting Office in a CONUS or contingency billet, and fill Critical Acquisition Positions at the O-5 level.

In 2007, the Marine Corps made the decision to remove the Contracting degree from the SEP. As a result, from 2007-2014, officers attended the Contingency Contracting Officer training at Marine Corps Service Support School (MCCSSS) in Camp Johnson, North Carolina. During this school, students would take a series of DAU courses to meet the Level I and Level II training requirements for certification. Officers would receive training through Level II and then be assigned to a 3006 billet. There were no graduate education opportunities designated for contracting officers for either resident or non-resident programs outside of the tuition assistance

programs that are available for all Marine officers. This restricted the officers available for selection due to the requirement for 24 business credit hours that were required for DAWIA certification. During this time, NPS continued to offer both resident and non-resident contracting officer degrees to DoD students but specific opportunities were not made available for Marine Corps Contracting Officers. Marine Corps Officers could take DAU classes to meet the Level III requirements, but had to compete for limited spots with the rest of the DoD contracting personnel. Due to deployments and operational requirements, many officers were unable to earn DAWIA Level III Certification on an initial tour as was previously possible. Contracting Officers were selected via MARADMIN, but there was little screening to ensure that officers had the career timing to fulfill follow on tours for contracting. As a result, many of the officers selected were not capable of filling the Field Grade billets designated for second tour officers. Officers selected were often close to retirement age or too senior to have the potential of completing follow on tours in contracting, contributing to the shortage of contracting officers.

In 2013, the Marine Corps decided to return to allowing contracting officers to attend NPS via the non-resident program and ceased DAU classes at MCCSSS. Officers were assigned to contracting billets and would complete the masters degree program during the first two years of their initial contracting tours. Most contracting officers were assigned to the Regional Contracting Offices (RCO) at MCI-W Camp Pendleton, CA or MCI-E in Camp Lejeune, NC. During this time, officers from the 0402, 3404, and 3002 MOS were eligible to apply.¹¹ Officers would no longer attend DAU classes to receive their initial training, but would earn DAU equivalencies via NPS. Both NPS and DAU met the requirements for DAWIA certification and enabled contracting officers to be certified and subsequently warranted and assigned to Operational Contracting Support or Contingency Contracting billets. However, NPS provided a

means for officers that did not possess undergraduate business degrees to fulfill the 24 business credit hours required for certification.

The establishment of the CPIB and CCLEB impacted contracting officer selection. The CPIB and CCLEB were established to “improve education utilization” and ensure that the Marine Corps “continues to produce and promote leaders of the highest caliber.”¹² It was not uncommon for officers with a competitive record to be selected for contracting and the CPIB or CCLEB. These officers were no longer eligible to fill contracting billets once they were selected on one of the Commandant’s Education Boards as it was the senior board and would “trump” their selection as a contracting officer. As a result, the contracting community was competing with the Marine Corps for the best officers, resulting in not enough or lower performing officers being selected for the MOS. By choosing to compete with the education boards, the most qualified and highly competitive officers were not eligible for accession into the 3006 MOS. Although the Marine Corps recently made NPS Distance Learning Masters Degrees available via MARADMIN, completion of these programs do not have a corresponding payback tour. There were officers who completed the non-resident contract management program that will not be required to fill contracting billets. The Marine Corps still continues to offer the Contract Management non-resident program through NPS but these officers are no longer required to fulfill a payback tour and these officers are not required to fill contracting officer billets.

In 2014, the Marine Corps announced via MARADMIN 357/14, that selection of contracting officers would now be via the CPIB and CCLEB and officers would attend the resident Master’s Degree Programs at NPS as was done prior to 2007. Officers will graduate from NPS and then complete a three-year utilization tour at a Regional Contracting Officer and the corresponding expeditionary contracting platoon (ECP). This adjustment to training is

compounding the issue with officer shortages. These officers will now have a two-year delay until they can begin serving in a contracting billet. Although this now allows the best qualified officers to be selected for the MOS, these officers will require two years of training before they are eligible to be assigned to a contracting billet. The Marine Corps has now gone from a three-month to an eighteen-month training pipeline during a time when officer staffing is already experiencing a shortage. The new training pipeline will also require two Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves that are both time consuming and costly to the Marine Corps. In 2017, seven Captains and one Major were selected on the CCLEB and CPIB.¹³

To further compound the staffing issues, due to the changes in Contracting Officer training and career progression, several key billets are unable to be staffed or are over or under staffed. For example, field grade officers are choosing to return to contracting billets in lieu of staff billets in their primary MOS. In this case there are O-5s filling O-4 billets when there are O-5 billets that are going unfilled. This is occurring because officers can voluntarily choose to return to the MOS. It is not uncommon for an O-5 who has not been selected for command or Top Level School (TLS) to spend the last 3-5 years of his or her career in a 3006 billet. Furthermore, the current staffing list shows several billets at the MEFs, MLG, and MARFORs are gapped and will be filled by first tour officers graduating from NPS. Although these officers may meet the “one up” rank requirement or possess the rank required for these billets, these billets are typically designated for second or third tour officers, but will be filled with first tour officers with no contracting experience. These critical OCS billets are at the MEF level, so a Captain advising the MEF Staff on OCS issues in a Major’s billet with no contracting experience. This would be sufficient if the community had adequate numbers of field grade officers to provide guidance and oversight, but due to the significant shortfall at the field grade

level, too many officers are being gapped to be able to absorb the remaining shortfalls and provide guidance or oversight to inexperienced officers. Too many billets are gapped and the officers designated to fill several of the billets do not have the requisite experience to do the job. The primary reason for the critical designation of these billets is to preclude individuals without the appropriate experience from being placed into positions for which they are not adequately prepared.¹⁴

Furthermore, the Marine Corps has not addressed the issues associated with the MOS and officer retention. Contracting is still a secondary MOS, and there is no incentive for officers to return to the MOS. Furthermore, due to the limited number of contracting officers, officers are frequently required to deploy to fill both Marine Corps and Joint billets in between their operating forces tours. These billets do not meet the requirement of a key billet or operating forces tour for the officer's primary MOS. For example, an officer can serve as a MEU or MEF contracting officer and deploy during a two to three year tour. Upon completion of an initial tour an officer will be required to return to the operating forces to establish and maintain MOS credibility in the operating forces at that rank and remain competitive for promotion and command.

Despite filling billets such as Contracting Operations Officer, MEF Contracting Officer, and Regional Contracting Officer Director, none of these billets are identified as a key billet or Command Equivalent Billet. The filling of these billets is critical to the Marine Corps, but they do not take the place of a key billet. Although 3006 officers are part of the Acquisition Workforce and receive the 8057 MOS similar to officers who complete acquisition tours at Marine Corps Systems Command (MARCORSYSCOM) there is no option to receive a permanent MOS of Contracting Officer. As a field grade officer, officers with four years of

contracting experience can apply to become an Acquisition Professional, and receive the 8058 MOS, but they will still be promoted in their primary MOS. This is different than officers serving in Program Management Billets who can apply to become acquisition officers after completing a tour at MARCORSYSCOM and receive the 8059 or 8061 MOS for designated Ground and Aviation Acquisition Officers.

V. CURRENT MANNING CHALLENGES

Due to shortfalls in the retention and training of contracting officers, the Marine Corps has had to place an over reliance on enlisted contracting Marines who possess the 3044 MOS or joint contract activities. In the case of a major contingency, a Joint Contracting Command (JCC) is typically established. The Marine Corps would be required to deploy Marines as part of the Joint Force to fill these billets on the Joint Manning Document (JMD). These billets have the highest priority, so in the case of a major contingency, the limited officer manpower resident in the community will be required to fill Joint Billets rather than provide OCS to the Marine Corps. This causes MAGTF commanders to assume unnecessary risk with regards to planning and coordinating contracted logistical support because the Marine Corps is unlikely to receive priority for support and can't influence procurement timelines or resources. Furthermore, there are limited deployable contracting personnel that can deploy to the Area of Operations and provide onsite support. After actions from operations in the 21st century routinely list contracting support as a key enabler, yet the Marine Corps has not taken appropriate action regarding talent management for contracting officers, resulting in significant risk to contract support sustaining the operating forces.

The current model provides for the selection of Captains and Majors from the 3002 Ground Supply MOS on the CCLEB and CPIB. The most recent change to Contracting Officer

selection further restricted the MOSs that are eligible to accede into the contracting MOS. Selected officers possessing the 3002 MOS will attend Naval Postgraduate School in Monterrey, CA and fulfill a designated payback tour. Upon completion of the tour, the officers will receive their Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA) Level III Certification and be eligible for follow on tours. The current training model does not provide for adequate staffing of key billets. Although the NPS program is sufficient for educating first tour contracting officers and meeting the education requirements for DAWIA certification, it does not provide the necessary experience to warrant or deploy contracting officers in support of the operating forces.

Following Naval Postgraduate School, a period of on the job training will still be necessary to teach basic contracting skills to officers such as drafting contractual documents, utilize contract writing systems, etc. Mastery of fundamental contracting skills is even more critical due to limited depth of contracting staffing. A MEU or SPMAGTF may deploy with only one or two contracting officers. Recent surveys of contracting officers have indicated that the ability to serve as a warranted contracting officer or contract specialist was a critical skill for Captains and Majors.¹⁵ Therefore, officers must receive adequate follow on training at a contract activity prior to deploying in a contingency contracting billet. The current model allows for one year of On-the-Job-Training (OJT) followed by two years assigned to the ECP. Although this model results in a well-trained, well-educated officer, it creates a three year training pipeline that is unsupportable. Many of these officers will be slated for Level II or Level III billets that will likely preclude them from completing an OJT period at a RCO.

Career progression for contracting officers is critical and must be carefully managed to ensure that personnel in critical contracting billets have the requisite skills, knowledge, and experience to accomplish the mission. Currently, there is a shortage of DAWIA Level II and III

Field Grade Officers that have completed more than one contracting tour. These personnel are needed to fill key billets at Regional Contracting Officers, MARFORs, MEFS, and to potentially deploy and establish Regional Contracting Centers (RCCs) in deployed environments. Warrants for contracting are currently controlled by Headquarters Marine Corps, and in a Joint deployed environment, a Joint Contracting Command (JCC) will be established. The Marine Corps will be unable both due to experience and regulations to have an adequate number of Commissioned Officers serve as warranted contracting officers. With the current model, it is unlikely that Headquarters, Marine Corps will warrant an officer with no experience writing contracts or working in a RCO. Although there are Major and LtCol Contracting Officers in the Marine Corps, many have not completed more than one contracting tour or served as a warranted contracting officer. Furthermore, many of these officers cannot be assigned to contracting billets because they need to serve in key billets in their primary MOS to maintain MOS credibility and remain competitive for promotion. It is unlikely that an officer would skip a key billet to deploy or serve as a contracting officer in a contingency unless the officer did not desire to be competitive for command or promotion to the next rank if they have not met their key billet requirements.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 3006 COMMUNITY

It is in the best interest of the Marine Corps to maintain a population of O-4 and O-5 field grade officers who can serve in Contracting Billets, specifically Critical Acquisition Positions at the O-5 Level and above. These officers need to be able to serve and remain competitive for promotion while possessing the requisite skills comparable to their peers in other services. The Marine Corps should make the 3006 MOS a primary MOS for field grade officers rather than remain a necessary MOS under the 3002 MOS. Currently, training, manning, and certification

for 3006 officers is managed by a hybrid of HQMC Installations and Logistics (I&L), MMOA, and MARCORSYSCOM. The Marine Corps should make contracting a primary MOS for field grade officers and adopt a model similar to the US Army and the Marine Corps Acquisition Community to resolve the talent management issues associated with a transient officer community. By having contracting remain a NMOS, contracting officers must remain proficient in both a primary and secondary MOS. Due to the technical training and experience requirements, the past ten years have proven that this is not a viable course of action. If the Marine Corps wants to have commissioned officers that are deployable as Contingency Contracting Officers and fill Critical Acquisition Positions, the Marine Corps must make the 3006 MOS a primary MOS for second tour officers. This will enable the promotion, retention, and training of these officers. This will not require additional manpower as these officers are already filling the billets; they would simply be re-designated and functionally aligned under a primary acquisition MOS.

The Marine Corps must address the issue of training, education, and career progression. The current NPS model is expensive and requires too much initial investment in an officer who may not be well suited or choose to return to the MOS for a follow on tour as a field grade officer. This model is unnecessary for officers on their initial tour and does not provide incentives for officers to return to the community for follow on tours or meet the current requirements of the operating forces. Furthermore, the selection of officers from the 3002 Ground Supply MOS is overly restrictive and limits the available pool of officers for selection. This is a deviation from the US Army and Marine Corps Acquisition communities, which select officers from all MOSs. Furthermore, recent changes, to include the return of the NPS program and establishment of the ECP have not addressed any of the talent management issues associated

with career retention and career progression. These changes, to include the establishment of the ECP and Resident NPS programs, have not fixed the real issue with the 3006 MOS. The real issues facing the community are that there isn't a viable career path for promotion and retention of field grade officers, there is only one billet above the rank of O-5, and none of the officers filling O-5 Critical Acquisition Positions are command screened. This is a deviation from the Marine Corps Acquisition community and the Contracting Occupational Fields from the other services which provide opportunities for command and promotion up to the General Officer level. The US Army career progression is similar to the Marine Corps Acquisition Officers and provides a viable career path for US Army 51c Officers. The sample career progression is outlined in Figure 2 below.





Figure 1. Professional Development Model (Officer)				
RANK SKILL LEVEL	CPT 	MAJ 	LTC 	COL 
OPERATING FORCE	CONTRACTING OFFICER CCT CONTRACTING BN STAFF OFFICER CONTRACTING BDE STAFF OFFICER	CONTRACTING OFFICER TEAM LDR CCT CONTRACTING BN STAFF OFFICER	CSL - CONTRACTING COMMAND CONTRACTING OFFICER SCCT LDR CONTRACTING BRIGADE STP OFFICER	CSL - CONTRACTING CMD/PARC
GENERATING FORCE ASSIGNMENT (not all inclusive)	ASSISTANT PRODUCT MANAGER OPERATIONAL TEST OFFICER COMBAT DEVELOPER	ASA(JALT)/DA STAFF OFF/ASSIGN OFF CONTRACTING OFFICER (USACE/DOD) DEPUTY PROJECT MANAGER OPERATIONAL TEST OFFICER COMBAT DEVELOPER	CSL - PRODUCT MANAGER CONTRACTING TM LD (USACE/DOD) ASA(JALT)/DA STAFF OFFICER DIRECTOR OF CONTRACTING DEPUTY PROJECT OFFICER	CSL - PROJECT MANAGER DEPUTY PEO ASA(JALT)/DA STAFF OFFICER ECC/ACC STAFF OFFICER
PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION	CPT CAREER COURSE AABC/AAICC/LAB	AABC/AAICC/LAB INTERMEDIATE LEVEL EDUCATION INTERMEDIATE QUALIFICATION COURSE	PRE-COMMAND COURSE	SENIOR SERVICE COLLEGE PRE-COMMAND COURSE
CAREER DEVELOPMENT	FUNCTIONAL EXPERIENCE BROADENING EXPERIENCE STRATEGIC EXPERIENCE			
FUNCTIONAL TRAINING	ASI: 5P (PARACHUTIST) ASI: 3B (AIR ASSAULT)	ASI: IX (GRN LEAN SIX SIGMA)	ASI: IY (BLK LEAN SIX SIGMA) ASI: A3 (FORCE DEVELOPMENT)	
SELF DEVELOPMENT (STRUCTURED)	MISSION SUPPORT TRAINING CONTINUOUS LEARNING POINTS	MISSION SUPPORT TRAINING CONTINUOUS LEARNING POINTS	CONTINUOUS LEARNING POINTS	CONTINUOUS LEARNING POINTS
SELF DEVELOPMENT (GUIDED)	ADVANCED CIVIL SCHOOLING TRAINING WITH INDUSTRY			
CIVILIAN EDUCATION GOALS	BA/BS 24 HOURS (BUSINESS)	MA/MS (BUSINESS DISCIPLINE)	MA/MS	MA/MS
CERTIFICATIONS	DAWIA LEVEL I/II	DAWIA LEVEL II/III	DAWIA LEVEL III	DAWIA LEVEL III
READING LIST		REIMER LIBRARY/ACCP/SMARTBOOK	REIMER LIBRARY/ACCP/SMARTBOOK	REIMER LIBRARY/ACCP

Figure 2. Example Army Contracting Officer Career Progression¹⁶

Contracting Officers should be assigned to an initial contracting billet similar to the acquisition community. Upon successful completion of a minimum two year tour and DAWIA Level II Certification, officers will meet training requirements via DAU and will be eligible to apply to non-resident NPS master's degree programs. This ensures the officer has adequate opportunities for education, yet meets the immediate needs of the operating forces. Upon successful completion of a contracting tour, officers could be screened on the CPIB or CCLEB to attend NPS at which point they would be required to fulfill a payback tour in Contracting. This is similar to the 8059 and 8061 MOS in which Lieutenant Colonels are screened for Top Level School (TLS) and can be selected to attend the Senior Acquisition Course. Their proposed career progression for a 3006 Officer is outlined in Figure 3 below.

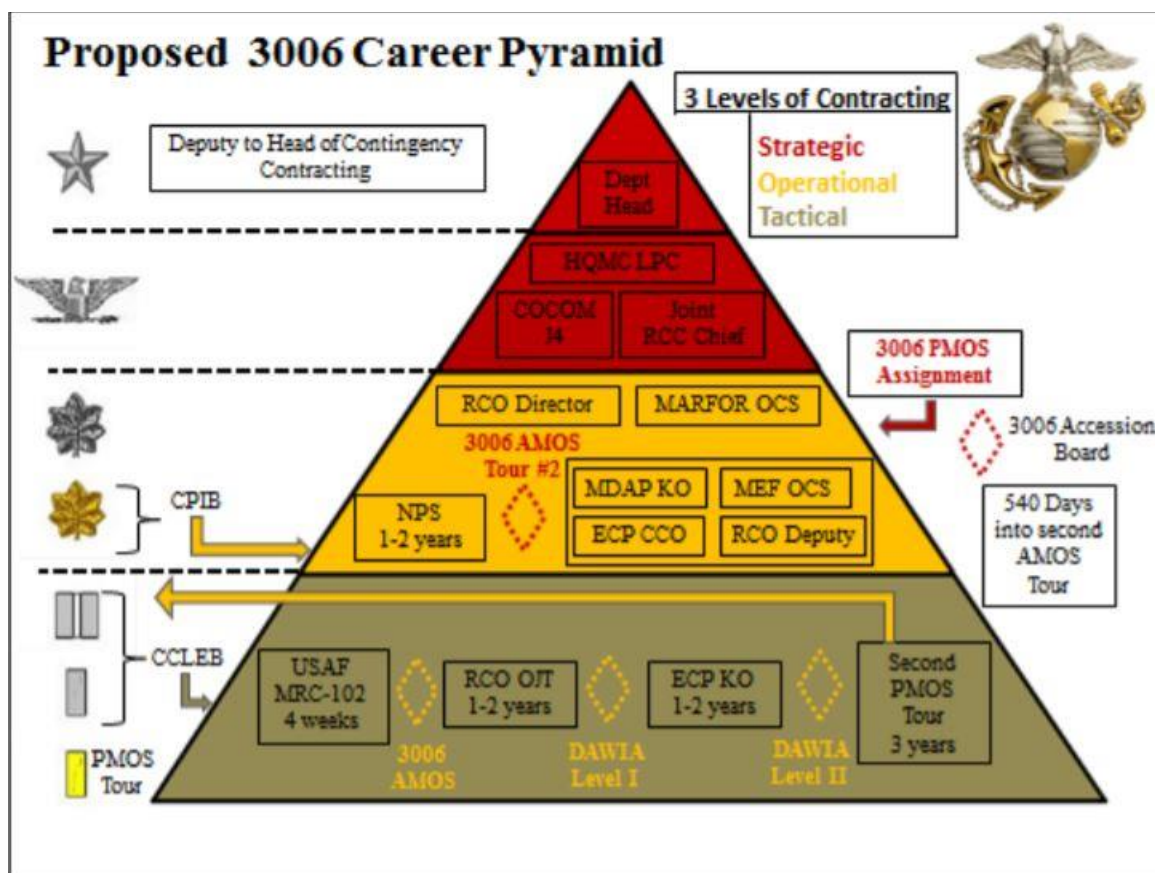


Figure 3. Proposed 3006 Career Progression

The proposed career progression suggested by NPS Students in 2016 is a significant improvement over the current career progression and would result in a viable career for contracting officers.¹⁷ Officers would have promotion opportunities past the rank of O-5. This would provide leadership and advocacy for the community as O-5 would no longer be the terminal rank for officers serving in 3006 billets. The proposed career progression would enable senior officers that could serve at the O-6 level and have parity of experience and rank with their peers in the Joint Force.

The contracting community should advocate for the establishment of a primary MOS for field grade officers serving as contracting officers in line with the US Army and the Marine Corps Acquisition Officers. Contracting Critical Acquisition Positions should be designated as Command Equivalent Billets, similar to the Acquisition Community. Additionally, the current model for assignment of Contracting Officers to fill Critical Acquisition Positions is inadequate. Officers are assigned by a monitor rather than being screened by a command board and training requirements can be waived or the billets are frequently gapped or dual-hatted. For example, it is not uncommon for a major who has been twice passed for promotion in their primary MOS to fill both the MEF Contracting Officer billet and the Regional Contracting Office Director billet concurrently. Furthermore, despite significant rank, experience, and responsibility required for these billets, they are not command equivalent or key billets. This disparity between the contracting and acquisition communities in the Marine Corps at the field grade ranks needs to be rectified. Level III Critical Acquisition Positions should be filled by field grade officers who possess the adequate rank, experience and certifications to fill the billets. This can only be accomplished by the creation of a permanent contracting officer MOS for field grade officers under the Acquisition community.

Officers should be eligible to be screened on the CCLEB or CPIB after they have completed an initial contracting tour. Officers can meet requirements for DAWIA Level I and Level II requirements via attendance at DAU classes during their initial tour. This method is much more cost effective and efficient to train officers for initial tours. Following an initial tour as a contracting officer and completion of DAWIA Level II certification, officers would have the option to attend NPS resident or non-resident NPS Master's degree programs upon selection via MARADMIN, or the CPIB. This will ensure that top performers that would be selected for critical billets such as RCO Director have the requisite training and experience as their civilian and joint counterparts. A recent survey of retention incentives for contracting officers in 2016 indicated that command billet opportunities and DoD funded graduate programs were the strongest retention incentives that could be offered. These were ranked as more desirable than incentive pay and PME equivalencies.¹⁸

Retention Incentive	Response	Qty	%
a. DOD funded graduate degree programs	No	6	29%
	Yes	15	71%
b. PME equivalencies for AMOS assignment	No	16	76%
	Yes	5	24%
c. Command billet opportunities aligned with the acquisitions MOS (8061)	No	8	38%
	Yes	13	62%
d. Special duty pay to incentivize retention	No	15	71%
	Yes	6	29%
e. None	No	20	95%
	Yes	1	5%
f. Other/Comments	Yes	5 responses	
	Reference Chapter V to view responses		
Table Legend	Highest Percent Yes	Highest Percent No	

Figure 4. 2016 Survey of Retention Incentives for 3006 MOS

To address the training aspect, follow on training sustainment or on the job training in a Regional Contracting Office or under the cognizance of a warranted KO is critical. Marine Corps Contracting Officers must be capable of serving in Contingency Contracting or OCS billets. In order to do so successfully, they must be familiar with current contracting regulations, contract writing systems, acquisition planning, etc. Similar to pilots receiving refresher training upon returning to a flying billet, contracting officers should spend a minimum of 90 days refreshing their contracting skills upon return to a contracting billet. This will ensure they receive a familiarization with updated contracting regulations and systems, can fulfill continuing education requirements, and are prepared to deploy and serve in a contingency contracting or OCS billet. Currently, there is no requirement for any sort of refresher training upon return to an OCS or contracting billet. Once an officer receives the 3006 MOS he or she can be required to deploy or be assigned to an OCS or Contingency Contracting billet regardless of training or experience. Therefore, it is in the best interest of the Marine Corps and the individual Marine to ensure that officers are trained and educated to serve in both capacities.

Finally, career progression and talent management needs to be considered for contracting officers. Key contracting billets need to be designated as key billet equivalencies. The Marine Corps should require the staffing of these billets and should be considered as equal to time in the operating forces at that particular rank for officers that possess the contracting MOS as a PMOS. For example, a 3006 Major serving as the MEF Contracting Officer should be able to receive MOS credibility as a Major for serving in the operating forces. This is only feasible if the Marine Corps makes the 3006 MOS a primary MOS for field grade officers. The way career progression is considered now, the same Major would have to return to the operating forces for a follow on tour in a 3002 billet following a 3006 tour to remain competitive for command and promotion.

Furthermore, key billets such as RCO Director should be designated as command equivalent billets as they are Critical Acquisition Positions. Board selection to these billets will enable Marines to serve in these capacities and remain competitive for command and selection to Top Level School (TLS). The Marine Corps should model their career progression and MOS selection off the Acquisition Officer pipeline to allow officers to serve in Contracting Billets and be promoted beyond the O-5 level.

In order to meet the requirements of both Contingency Contracting and OCS billets, the Marine Corps needs to increase both the experience and quantity of contracting officers. The over reliance on enlisted Marines and Civilian Marines who are non-deployable must be corrected. The significant number of field grade billets that are gapped or intended to be filled with officers with no experience in the contracting field needs to be addressed with a viable short and long term solution.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Marine Corps must address the real issue at hand which is the lack of a primary contracting officer MOS that is functionally aligned under the acquisition community. This will solve the issue of promotion and retention of 3006 officers who will be able be retained and promoted under a primary acquisition MOS. The best graduate education will not make up for the lack of a viable career path. The logistics and acquisition communities need to reach a consensus regarding the transition of the 3006 MOS permanently to an acquisition MOS for field grade officers. The Marine Corps should use a variety of training pipelines to include OJT, DAU, NPS, and Non-Resident NPS programs to train and educate their officers. This will enable the growth and sustainment of an active duty contracting officer population that can staff critical billets and possess the necessary expertise and certifications to support the operating forces. The

career progression must be managed and made more flexible to ensure that the Marine Corps can train and retain a cadre of competent contracting officers with the appropriate rank and experience to fulfill operational requirements. The past decade has shown that regardless of the training pipeline or education offered, retention will still be inadequate without changes to the 3006 MOS. Without changes to the current model, the trend of talented officers leaving the MOS and not returning will continue, especially when there is no advocacy above the O-5 level. Operational and contingency contracting support will continue to be a requirement to support expeditionary operations for years to come. The Marine Corps must capitalize on the lessons learned from recent operations, adopt best practices from the 8059 and 8061 MOSs and the Joint Force to ensure the Contracting Officer Community remains viable and capable of supporting the operating forces.

NOTES

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