MARINE CORPS RETENTION

ENLISTED PERSONNEL

We continue to retain Marines at unprecedented levels in order to grow the Marine Corps' end strength to 202,000. Retention goals were substantially increased in mid-fiscal year 2007 and will continue to increase through fiscal year 2011 to support the continued growth of our force. The dynamics of the Corps' manpower system must match the required skills and grades to stand up and staff additional units to enable a 1:2 deployment-to-dwell time ratio.

The Marine Corps' enlisted retention efforts remain vigilant due to the lucrative civilian employment opportunities that exist for our Marines. Our Corps has traditionally retained 25% of first-term Marines to sustain the career force. In fiscal year 2007, this requirement was raised to 34% of first-term Marines to support the yearly end strength milestone of 184,000. The fiscal year 2007 milestone was eclipsed by 2,490.

For fiscal year 2008, we must retain 41% of our first-term Marines and 74% of our career Marines to support the fiscal year 2008 end strength milestone of 189,000. For this reason, the budget for the Selective Reenlistment Bonus (SRB) program was substantially increased and proportioned towards our career force, including Marines with 16 to 20 years of active service.

Because combat experience and MOS proficiency remains essential to the future of our Corps, every effort must be made to retain our "best and brightest" Marines by seeking continued funding for the SRB in future years. The SRB has significantly aided reenlistment endeavors and has improved retention for some critical skill shortages. However, due to the creation of new operational units, shortages persist in some specialties, such as intelligence, explosive ordnance disposal, reconnaissance, combat engineering, and military police, proving the importance of continued increases in SRB funding levels.

To meet the demands of our aggressive retention goals, our retention and personnel assignment policies are evolving to meet the demands for a growing force. Traditional policies that were focused on maintaining a stable end strength are now unnecessary and are being adjusted. As such, boatspace limits for first term Marines were lifted in fiscal year 2007 and remain so for fiscal year 2008. Various forms of Assignment Incentive Pay (AIP) are also being introduced to encourage continued assignment of experienced NCOs in the operational forces. Likewise, some assignments aboard bases and stations are being adjusted from three to two years to allow more Marines and their families a respite from deployments.

Though the SRB program is greatly enabling our retention success, we cannot disregard the intangible attributes, such as pride of service and the satisfaction of leadership responsibilities, as significant influences on retaining dedicated men and women. It is the responsibility of all leaders within the officer and enlisted ranks to ensure Marines are educated on the importance of retention and on our evolving retention policies and incentives. Leaders must continue to reinforce these

intangible attributes and encourage Marines not to make career decisions based on the current operational tempo.

OFFICERS

The Marine Corps officer retention goal is to retain the "best and fully qualified" officers, in the right grades, with the right skills to provide the capabilities required in the operating forces. Historically, the aggregate officer retention rate is 90.5 percent. For fiscal year 2008, the Marine Corps is on pace to meet or exceed its retention goals within the officer corps. Regardless, Manpower planners continue to look for indicators showing a trend toward higher attrition in future years. Although overall officer retention is excellent, shortages do exist in certain grades and skills, requiring careful management and innovative solutions.

To this end, the Marine Corps has active programs in place, both monetary and non-monetary, to ensure officer retention remains high. Monetary tools already implemented include Aviation Continuation Pay and Law School Education Debt Subsidy. Non-monetary programs include voluntary lateral moves, inter-service transfers to the Marine Corps, and Return to Active Duty. All of these programs provide incentives to officers for continued service even in the face of significant operational tempo, while allowing flexibility to manpower planners to meet requirements across the Marine Corps Total Force.