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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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PREPARING THE INFANTRY RIFLE SQUAD LEADER TO SUCCEED IN THE  
FUTURE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

MAJOR BRANDON N. CURRIE, USMC

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## Executive Summary

**Title:** Preparing the Infantry Rifle Squad Leader for Success in the Future Operating Environment

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**Thesis:** The Marine Corps must drastically change its approach to the infantry squad leader billet, principally through the acknowledgement of its critical-billet status, then must institute an organization to serve as the hub for infantry modernization, evolving doctrine, and all infantry-specific course curricula. While the Squad Leader Development Program (SLDP) provides a nominal fix due to its narrow focus on Marines with three to six years of service and the constraint to deploy once as an 0365 (Infantry Squad Leader), the Marine Corps should recognize it has neglected a deep pool of talent—Marine Security Force guards—and invest in these capable leaders to fight and win in the FOE.

**Discussion:** For too long the Marine Corps has satisfied with the dormant training and education continuum, disregarded talent management, and marginalized the non-commissioned officers joining the Operating Forces from the Marine Corps Security Force Regiment. The first step is to establish an “Infantry Center of Excellence” (ICoE) charged with overseeing the advancement of the infantry occupational field. The Service *must* cultivate the talent residing at the two Security Force Battalions at Bangor, Washington, and Kings Bay, Georgia by adequately staffing and resourcing them accordingly. The ICoE will also manage the emerging personnel programs and initiative to ensure that not only are each of the 648 rifle squad are led by a school-trained sergeant, but the curriculum for certifying the squad leader is progressing to achieve the desired end state envisioned in the *Marine Corps Operating Concept* (MOC).

**Conclusion:** The Marine Corps cannot afford to wait to 2025 to meet the aims of the *MOC*. The Marine Corps must invest in its frontline combat leader now. For too long the Marine Corps has gambled with the lives of its most precious asset—the individual Marine. Rightfully so, the Service has embraced technology and developed impressive capabilities that target to provide friendly forces with an asymmetrical advantage on the battlefield. However, if we do not alter our accessions and training, we will be unable to maximize the lethality of tomorrow’s battlefields.

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## **Introduction**

*The Marine Corps is currently not organized, trained, and equipped to meet the demands of a future operating environment characterized by complex terrain, technology proliferation, information warfare, the need to shield and exploit signatures, and an increasingly non-permissive maritime domain.*

—Marine Corps Operating Concept<sup>1</sup>

The *Marine Corps Operating Concept (MOC)* draws attention to the Corps' central problem as it pertains to its foundational warfighting element, the Marine rifle squad. As the theater of war has become more sophisticated and our adversaries more formidable, the preparation of small-unit leaders charged with leading our frontline units is dormant. The Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies, and Operations (DC, PP&O), responsible for the synchronization of the Service's plans and policies in addition to serving as the advocate for the Ground Combat Element, designated infantry squad leader staffing as his main priority for the 2–17 Ground Board.<sup>2</sup> For too long the Marine Corps neglected the proper preparation and training of its frontline leaders—Marine rifle squad leaders. The Marine Corps cannot afford to wait to 2025 to meet the aims of the *MOC*. The Marine Corps must invest in its frontline combat leaders now.

Future conflicts/wars necessitate the continuous drive of increasing multidimensional capabilities pushed down to the lowest tactical level, the Marine rifle squad. The Marine Corps has regrettably created an infantry it cannot properly man or poise to succeed in the future operating environment (FOE), and the solution to this decades-old problem will not be quick or easy, but it *will* be essential to the Corps' combat effectiveness. The Marine Corps must drastically change its approach to the infantry squad leader billet, principally through the acknowledgement of its critical-billet status, then must institute an organization to serve as the hub for infantry modernization, evolving doctrine, and all infantry-specific course curricula. While the Squad Leader Development Program (SLDP) provides a nominal fix due

to its narrow focus on Marines with three to six years of service and the constraint to deploy once as an 0365 (Infantry Squad Leader), the Marine Corps should recognize it has neglected a deep pool of talent—Marine Security Force guards—and invest in these capable leaders to fight and win in the FOE.

The institution is making some strides toward solving the problem of neglected infantry squad leaders through three initiatives: the aforementioned SLDP, the Infantry Leader Program, and the proposed “Ender Track.” In 2015, under the auspice of the Enlistment Incentive Program, the Marine Corps implemented the Program Enlisted For (PEF) code “QH”. Officially referred to as the “Infantry Leader Program,” this program seeks to join 300 young men and women for a six-year term of enlistment and offering a \$5,000 bonus. This program presents a unique talent management opportunity for the infantry community—a six-year contracted Marine with higher entry requirements who enlist to be an infantry leader. Only recently has the broader infantry community become aware of this PEF and its potential opportunities. It remains to be seen how this annual cohort of Marines will be groomed, tracked, and employed as future squad leaders.

According to LtCol James W. Lively, the Marine Corps’ Infantry Advocate, another program in the works is an initiative referred to as the Ender Track (a nod to the Orson Scott Card science fiction novel), the premise of which is to propagate wunderkinds for development into warriors. This initiative proposes to target high-performing junior Marines with one deployment and to have them execute an early re-enlistment, thus obligating them to six years of service. The identified Marine would be removed from the Operating Forces to undergo a 12-month maturation and edification process. The year would be centered on training and education, beginning at Advanced Infantry Training Battalion (AITB) and followed by other skill-enhancement training from existing schools as outlined in the MOS manual for 03XX (infantry) occupational skills progression. As this program is developed,

options include adding a second year where the Marine could serve in a training cadre (along with being mentored) at Tactical Training Exercise Control Group, the Mountain Warfare Training Center, or either of the Schools of Infantry. These two routes, coupled with SLDP (which will be discussed in detail later) demonstrate that critical thought has been put forth in rectifying this problem.

It must be understood that there is no single solution that will resolve this protracted problem, nor does the solution presented in this paper does intend to do so; rather, the argument is that there is another method—one that targets the talented infantrymen serving as Marine Security Force guards—that should be included in the overall solution.

The aim of this paper is to address the consequences the infantry community has endured from shouldering years of lack of strategic foresight, which has led to stagnation and thus an overall diminished lethality of the infantry rifle squad. This will be illustrated by providing an abbreviated history of the problem, followed by discussing the FOE as it is envisioned in the *MOC*. Next will be an analysis of the contributing factors as they pertain to the manning and training of the force. Finally, this paper introduces a solution intended to compliment the current efforts by the DC, PP&O.

## **Background**

The modern evolution of the infantry squad leader dates back to 1999 when then-Commandant Gen Charles C. Krulak introduced “the strategic corporal” and his vision of how wars will be fought in the renowned “three-block war.”<sup>3</sup> This foundation was built on and advanced in 2005 with the release of then-Commandant Gen Michael W. Hagee’s white paper defining the demands on the infantry squad leader and professing that the requirements would continue to increase.<sup>4</sup> Also in 2005, while serving as the Commanding General for Marine Corps Combat Development Command, then-LtGen James N. Mattis asked the Naval

Research Advisory Committee (NRAC) to study which technologies would be critical to enabling Distributed Operations (DO) and compare and contrast it with conventional operations with specific focus dedicated to the infantry squad training.<sup>5</sup> In July 2006, NRAC published the requested report, providing two significant recommendations:

- “The DO concept of operations elevates the infantry military operational specialty (MOS) to be comparable to other advanced-skilled, training-intensive MOSs such as aviation or armor. This increased cognitive demand may warrant review of the General Competency Test thresholds currently applicable to infantry at recruitment, as well as additional screening for critical cultural and decision-making skills at accession.”<sup>6</sup>
- “The Marine Corps should evaluate the feasibility, desirability, and means of aging the force in order to maximize return on investment in much more highly trained infantrymen.”<sup>7</sup>

Reinforcing the NRAC report, in March 2007 the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) published “Distributed Operations: Manpower Policies for Developing Small Unit Leaders.” The report argued that the squad leader of the future will require more skills such as certification in the application of both direct and indirect combined arms, increased proficiency in command and control systems that would facilitate squads operating up to 10 kilometers from their platoon’s headquarters, and the husbanding of additional critical logistical resources.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, this study recommended a dramatic departure from the current manpower management approach to support satisfying the 5–7 year time-in-service requirement for the rifle squad by precluding squad leaders from serving outside of the infantry battalions within their first 7 years of service.<sup>9</sup>

In July 2007, while serving as the Commanding General for 3rd Marine Division, then-MajGen Robert B. Neller penned a memo titled, “A Commitment to Squad Leaders.” The future commandant argued that unless the Marine Corps commits to making a significant investment in the development of infantry squad leaders, it will never achieve its desired results, nor will the squads as a whole maximize their combat effectiveness.<sup>10</sup> Four years later, in December 2011, MCCDC’s Operations Analysis Division released a report aiming to determine those characteristics and required skills that enlisted small-unit leaders must have to equate to success.”<sup>11</sup> Finally, in September 2016, the *MOC* was published, opening with a vignette centered on II Marine Expeditionary Force as part of a combined/joint force, aiding key allies in repelling an aggressive neighbor and quelling a proxy-force insurgency via Expeditionary Advanced Base (EAB) Operations—modern-day DO—speculating that squad leaders will operate independently and have access to and authorization to employ virtually any asset available to the joint force. The *MOC* repeatedly mentioned the increasing burdens placed upon our infantry small units and declared that the Service’s concept makes very clear the expectation that a “superior infantry is a Marine Corps asymmetric advantage.”<sup>12</sup> Interwoven throughout these studies, publications, and operating concepts are the writings of infantry professionals serving as the drumbeat of professional discourse. These numerous articles in professional journals, on blogs, and in published masters theses have continued to highlight this longstanding concern.

For decades, the Marine Corps has permitted ill-prepared Marines to lead its frontline units, the Marine rifle squads. There has long been overemphasis on the throughput of graduating students from ATIB courses without the acknowledgement that simply attending these courses alone does not sufficiently certify infantrymen as capable squad leaders. An example of this is 1st Marine Division’s “Order 3501.1B, Infantry Unit Leader Professional Military Education Requirements,” which only mandates that Marines serving in the billet of

squad leader must successfully complete Advanced Infantry Marine Course. While the former 1st Marine Division Commanding General's intentions were sound, the reality is that the manpower model is not designed to support this directive. There are two significant factors inhibiting the success of this policy—manpower timing and the method of school seat allotment. The average deployment-to-dwell ratio for an infantry battalion has been 1:2, which means 7 months deployed followed by 14 months at home station.<sup>13</sup> Non-commissioned officers (NCOs) do not get sourced to a battalion until D-180 (six months prior to deployment). These NCOs—typically arriving from any of the Security Force detachments, Supporting Establishment tours such as The Basic School, or post-Special Duty Assignment (SDA)—do not generally arrive en masse. This allots the gaining battalion little time to evaluate and train its crop of NCOs for AITB courses.

The other factor at play occurs when infantry battalions are allotted their school seats in each of the AITB courses. Regiments habitually apportion the battalion that has just returned from a deployment the most school seats. This forces the battalion to send junior Marines, typically lance corporals who recently deployed as a rifleman, to fill the school seats. These Marines are more apt to serve as fire team leaders. However, if they pass, they fill the void left by the NCO who predictably will execute orders or depart active duty in the months upon redeployment until the next wave of NCOs arrive. This fragmented cycle has the propensity to lead to a variety of issues, such as resentment toward the newly joined NCO for taking over for the school-trained lance corporal who led the squad for 6–9 months. The mass exodus of NCOs early in the unit's pre-deployment training plan, coupled with the prolonged gap before their replacements arrive, creates a leadership void that often leads to disciplinary problems like hazing and sexual assault. A snapshot of 2d Marine Division's squad leader population on January 10, 2018 reflected that 48 Marine rifle squads were led by a school-

trained sergeant, leaving the other 243 being led by a Marine not adequately qualified or not possessing the required rank of sergeant.<sup>14</sup>

Headquarters Marine Corps' Ground Combat Element Branch, specifically the Infantry Advocate, has addressed the downfall of this essential frontline element for more than 10 years. This topic emerged during Ground Board 1–07 on the topic of NCO staffing in infantry battalions. The Board noted "...although infantry battalions deploy with 100% of staffing goal for E-1's to E-5's, most battalions have less than 30% of the 03XX NCOs they rate by T/O. The deploying force is younger, less experienced, less mature, and often those in team leader and squad leader billets must lead similarly inexperienced peers."<sup>15</sup> Ten years later, the report from Ground Board 2–17 indicated

"In spite of the criticality of this billet, only 20-25% of rifle squads are staffed by Infantry Small Unit Leader Course (ISULC) trained, sergeant squad leader. For more than ten years, the Infantry Operational Advisory Group, GCE Conference, Ground Board, multiple service-initiated studies, academic papers, and articles have examined this gap and offered numerous solutions. After a decade, the institution remains unable to consistently staff its rifle squads with qualified sergeant squad leaders to achieve desired levels of readiness and performance."<sup>16</sup>

This complex issue has endured for years without significant progression. Based on the current and envisioned future operating environment and methods of employment, it is imperative to take action now.

### **Future Operating Environment**

*While the basic nature of war is constant, the means and methods we use evolve continuously.*  
17

—“MCDP 1, Warfighting”

The current operating environment would be unfathomable to our forefathers who fought across the globe, from the Banana Wars to the islands of the Pacific, and the FOE will be unlike that which veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom experienced. What follows are a series of excerpts from former Commandants on their visions of the operating environment and potential threats to be faced by the Marine Corps.

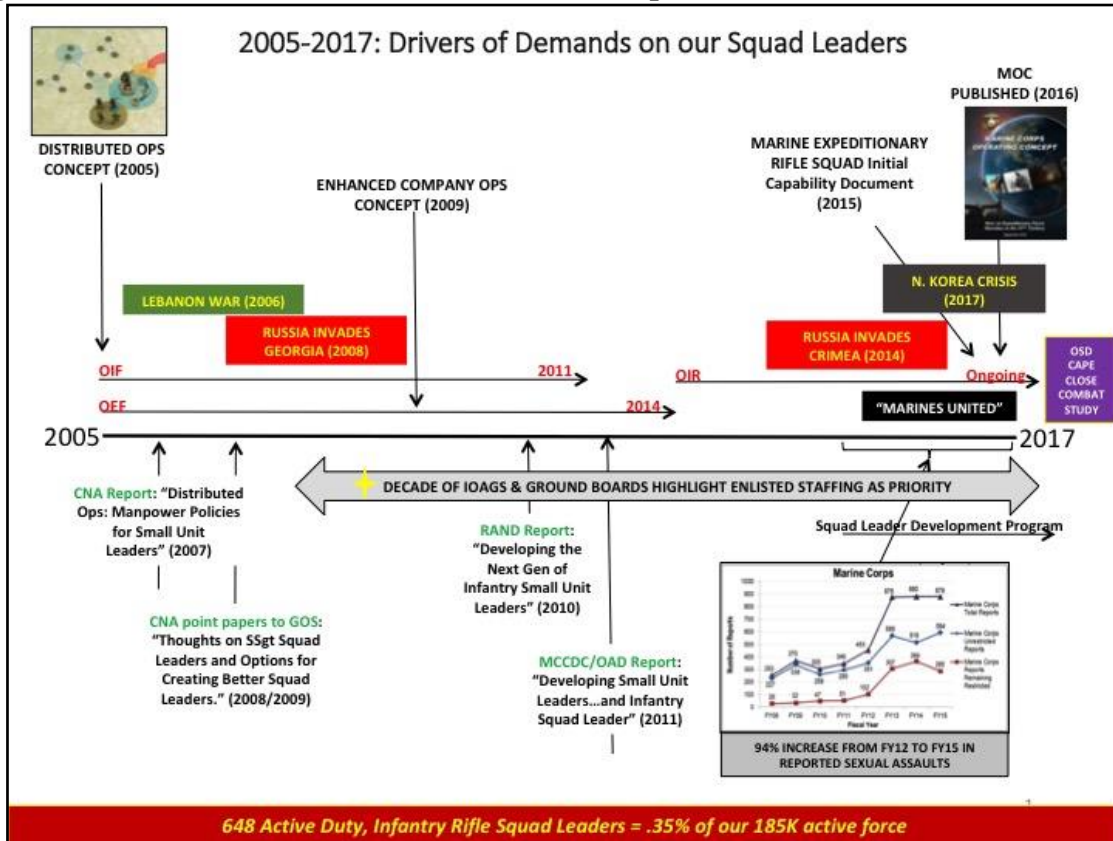
The 33rd Commandant, Gen Michael Hagee, argued that, reading, “The future holds a greater likelihood of irregular wars fought in urban environments, against enemies using asymmetric tactics. Thus, we will adapt our tactics, techniques, and procedures as well as technology to enhance our capabilities to succeed in these environments.”<sup>18</sup>

The direction to enhance the Corps’ capabilities is prophetic and will be addressed later in this paper. Gen Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., while serving as the 36th Commandant, described the modern operating environment as “volatile and complex.” When addressing the FOE, he went on to declare that there are no suggestions that tomorrow’s threats and operating environment will diminish, but rather will continue to gain complexity.<sup>19</sup> Marine Corps Intelligence Activity’s *Future Operating Environment 2015–2025: Implications for Marines* also provides a vision of the operating environment the Marine Corps will face in the future. This assessment gave rise to what is referred to in the *MOC* as the five key drivers of change: complex terrain, technology proliferation, information as a weapon, battle of signatures, and increasingly contested maritime domain.<sup>20</sup>

The former Commandants’ guidance addresses their visions of how the Marine Corps infantry will succeed. They all reference developing technology that provides the infantryman with enhanced capabilities, investing and advancing training and education, and attracting and retaining the best and brightest American citizens. Figure 1 is a graphical depiction of the

relevant global conflicts, Service-level concepts, and other contributing factors that have increase the demands on the 648 rifle squad leaders.”<sup>21</sup>

**Figure 1: 2005–17: Drivers of Demands on Rifle Squad Leaders**



Source: Information paper on Squad Leader Staffing Topic prepared for Ground Board 2–17.

## Manning

The most practical way in which the Marine Corps will succeed in the future is to develop technology to give the warfighter an advantage over adversaries. The vast majority of the emerging multidimensional capabilities are designed for implementation at the lowest tactical level, the Marine rifle squad.

While warfighting technology is progressing, the basic prerequisites for the Marine rifleman are not. Table 1 illustrates that the Marine rifleman has the lowest General Technical (GT) score requirement among all MOSs, while Figure 2 is a graphical depiction of some of

the requirements levied on the squad leader, many of which, such as the employment of the Small Unmanned Aircraft System (sUAS) and the requirements highlighted in the 2015 Marine Expeditionary Rifle Squad Initial Capabilities Document, are indicators that the squad leader should possess a higher GT score.

The topic of recruiting intellectually capable infantrymen has long been written about; yet, very little has changed in practice. In fact, the competition for intellectually competent young men and women is increasing with the advent of U.S. Marine Corps Forces,

**Table 1: Range of Military Occupational Specialties and GT Score Requirements.**

MOS	Billet	Min. GT Score
0311/0331/0341	Rifleman/Machine Gunner/Mortarman	80
3381	Food Specialist	90
1812	M1A1 Tank Crewman	90
0811	Field Artillery Cannoneer	90
1833	Assault Amphibious Vehicle Crewmember	90
0231	Intelligence Specialist	100
4671	Combat Videographer	100
5526	Musician	100
6541	Aviation Ordnance System Technician	105
4341	Combat Correspondent	105
6821	Weather Observer	105
0321	Reconnaissance Man	105
0370	Critical Skills Operator	105
7251	Air Traffic Controller	105
0511	MAGTF Planning Specialist	110
4066	Small Computer Systems Specialist	110
2611	Cryptologic Cyberspace Analyst	110
U.S Army Ranger	Operator in 75th Ranger Regiment	105
U.S Army Special Forces	Green Beret	107
U.S Army Special Forces Candidate	Green Beret	110
U.S. Navy SEAL	SEAL Operator	110
0311/0365	Rifle Squad Leader/"strategic corporal"	80

Source: NAVMC 1200.IC, FY18 MOS Manual.

Cyberspace Command, and the acquisition of the F-35, among other programs.<sup>22</sup> Ten years ago, BGen Christian Wortman, now the director of the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, proposed recommendations regarding the accession of the infantryman, including the following:

- Assign a fixed percentage of upper-mental category infantry programs to the Recruiting Command for an annual accession mission to ensure the intellectual capacity for small-unit leaders in a contemporary operating environment.<sup>23</sup>
- Eliminate “Category IV” mental group accessions into the infantry and eliminate the current “bubble” of them in the infantry.<sup>24</sup>
- Evaluate, in conjunction with behavioral scientists and psychologists, the moral (i.e., law enforcement) and drug waiver criteria for assignment to the infantry. Eliminate the infantry as one of the few enlistment programs with no moral or prior-service drug use quality standards.<sup>25</sup>

**Figure 2: Expectations of an Infantry Rifle Squad Leader.**



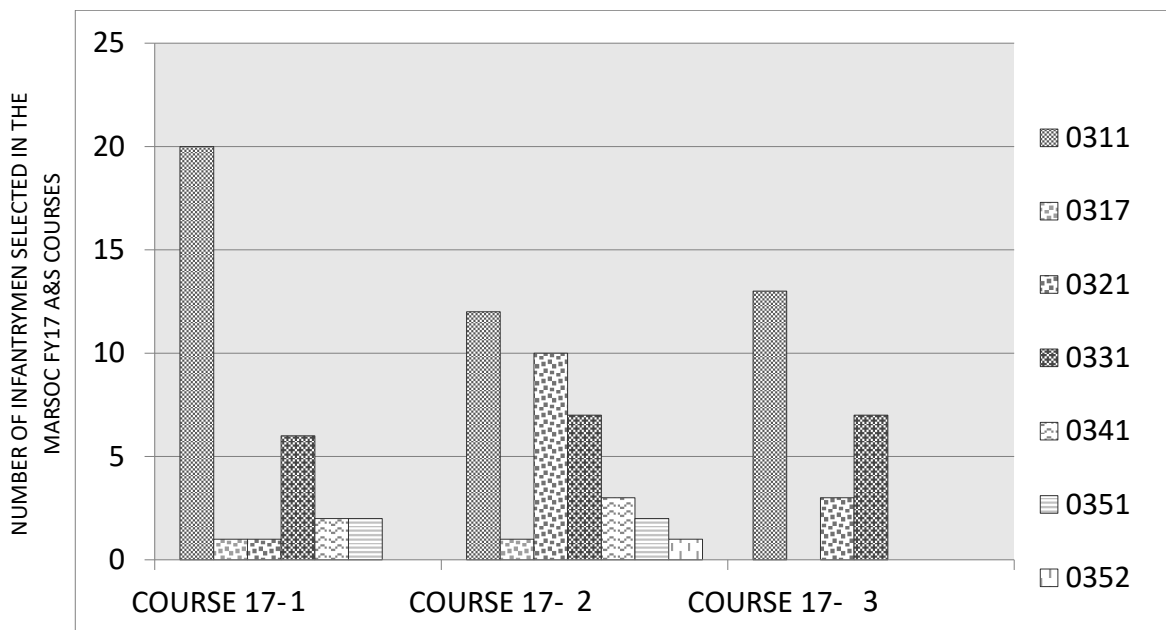
Source: Information paper on Squad Leader Staffing Topic prepared for Ground Board 2-17.

With the exception of the first listed recommendation, no other significant changes have been made to the basic requirements for young men and women to join the infantry. Referring back to the first recommendation on the apportioning a certain allocation of “upper-mental category” personnel for service in the infantry, this came about in FY16 under the veil of the Infantry Leader Program, with the goal of apportioning a total of 300 future infantrymen under this contract. According Marine Corps Recruiting Command, the QH PEF exceeded its target each fiscal year with 305 contracts in FY16, 303 contracts in FY17, and, five months into FY18, there have been 183 (61%) contracts signed by prospective infantrymen.<sup>26</sup>

The Marine Corps is hemorrhaging infantrymen.<sup>27</sup> The cause for this is complex and consists of both internal and external factors. The external competing interests that allure Marines to depart active duty are numerous, and include the pursuit of a college education, attendance at a trade school, or the embarkation upon an alternate career, such joining a police force. Historically, 70–75% of the first-term infantrymen opt to leave the Marine Corps after four years.<sup>28</sup> Conversely, there are competing interests internal to the Corps that pull Marines away from the infantry, such as re-enlistment into another MOSs (generally one that provides a marketable skill) or seeking to join the reconnaissance or the Special Forces communities. In FY17 alone, 89 03XX Marines were accepted into the Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC) pipeline, 45 of those being 0311s (see Table 2). This number is just shy of the total number of school-trained squads led by sergeants in 2d Marine Division on January 10, 2018, when the Infantry Advocate surveyed the division.<sup>29</sup> The special operations and reconnaissance communities will always be attractive to infantry leaders, and Marines departing for these communities only make the entire Service better. The argument is not proposing to suppress this option, but rather factoring it into the overall annual manpower calculus.

During his time as Commandant, Gen Dunford proposed the SLDP devised to “address the current gaps in NCO and SNCO leadership by revamping our current manpower management and readiness reporting models, systems, policies, and processes.”<sup>30</sup> In an effort to address these challenges, he added that the Marine Corps would pioneer other initiatives to improve the experience and maturity of small-unit leaders.<sup>31</sup>

**Table 2: MARSOC’s FY17 Enlisted Infantry Accession Data.**



*Source:* MSgt Joshua Welsh, Assessment and Selection Branch, Marine Raider Training Center.

With this program, the SLDP candidate receives the benefit of getting top-priority placement in advanced courses and at Sergeants Course. If still a corporal, the Marine will be promoted to the rank of sergeant upon completion of the training requirements, in addition to receiving a modest bonus. In turn, the Marine is required to spend an additional 36 months and one deployment in the Operating Forces while serving as a squad leader.

## **Training**

The Advanced Infantry Training Battalion courses have made improvements over the years. However, if the Marine Corps remains on its current trajectory, the gap between training/education and technology will be too great to close. In the 1990s, enlisted infantrymen attended advanced courses, even while not a requirement. The courses then went through a series of changes in the early 2000s. For a brief period, the advanced infantry courses were the only Enlisted Professional Military Education (EPME) requirement, suspending the requirement to attend the Sergeants Course. This arrangement required the advanced infantry courses to apportion time in its curriculum to learning objectives pertinent to Sergeants Course in the curriculum. Present-day Advanced Infantry Courses emerged based on the lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet, it was not until 2015 that Training and Education Command introduced Infantry Small Unit Leaders Course (ISULC). The following is the mission statement of ISULC:

*The purpose of this (ISULC) course is to develop an infantry Sergeant that trains and leads their unit, in accordance with his commander's intent. Furthermore across the Range of Military Operations (ROMO) with a bias for action that supports the Marine Corps' maneuver warfare philosophy in a complex operating environment.<sup>32</sup>*

What this broad mission statement is attempting to convey is that ISULC is a follow-on course designed to teach infantry sergeants how to think critically and succeed in the FOE. Moreover, this is the institution's acknowledgement that the previous pipeline was not producing an effective squad leader (rather, it was more apt to produce an able fire team leader). The training and education continuum for enlisted leaders in the infantry must be restructured.

The infantry squad leader is the Marine Corps' frontline combat leader. This Marine must possess the requisite skills and also the will to be an effective combat leader. By the time the average infantry company commander assumes command, they have completed The Basic School (26 weeks in length), Infantry Officer Course (13 weeks), and Expeditionary Warfare School (41 weeks), for a total of more than 80 weeks, or 18 months, of immersed, well-resourced education. On the other end of the spectrum, the infantry squad leader's pipeline consists of entry-level training at the School of Infantry (9 weeks), Advanced Infantry Course (7 weeks), and Infantry Small Unit Leaders Course (6 weeks), totaling 22 weeks, or just over 5 months of education. This does not discount the experience gained through time served in an infantry battalion, nor does it include other EPME, such as weeklong Lance Corporal Seminar, the 3-week Corporals Course, and the 4-week Sergeants Course. However, when compared to the amount of time invested in the infantry officer versus that of the squad leader, it becomes clear that our frontline leaders deserve more.

In 2007, AITB began sending select Infantry Unit Leader Course instructors, staff noncommissioned officers (SNCOs), through the Infantry Officer Course in an attempt to coalesce the two courses. The result was returning platoon sergeants to the Operating Forces with an increased tactical proficiency, who understand the operational art of warfare, and can speak a common, professional language with their platoon commander. The Infantry Unit Leader Course has continued to progress over the last decade. The same cannot be said about the courses aimed at the infantry squad leader.

### **A Neglected Pool of Talent and the Way Ahead**

*Our recruiting standards, manning policies, training, and education must constantly evolve to produce Marines who can meet those challenges.<sup>33</sup>*

—Gen Dunford, 36th Commandant's Planning Guidance: Innovate, Adapt, and Win

The Marine Corps cannot accept the status quo if its leaders expect the successful ground execution of the concepts which they travel the globe proselytizing. The *MOC* acknowledges that the Service has made steep advances in technology in an effort to succeed in tomorrow's conflicts, as well as recognizing that objective analysis and mental acuity are equally important.<sup>34</sup> With Gen Dunford's guidance pertaining to accessions, manning, and training and education in mind, it is time to take aggressive action to ensure mission success in the FOE. The way ahead begins with establishing an organization that will serve as the infantry nerve center, focused on advancing the occupational field toward winning in the FOE. Once established, this organization would progress and oversee the community's curricula. The Marine Corps must alter existing manpower initiatives and capitalize on the full depth and breadth of its population, which involves investing in the Marines serving their initial enlistments as Marine Corps Security Force guards. Finally, the proposed infantry hub institution must aggregate all the Marine Corps' emerging infantry personnel initiatives to ensure the talent pool is properly managed.

In an effort to achieve the desired results prescribed in the *MOC* of possessing an "asymmetric advantage by having a superior infantry", it is essential to create an institution that is solely focused on achieving this success. The U.S. Army charges its Maneuver Center of Excellence with the development of "...the doctrine and capabilities of the Maneuver Force...to ensure our Army's Maneuver Force remains the world's premier combat force ready to 'Win in a Complex World.'"<sup>35</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to advocate where this establishment should be located or what the task organization should be; rather, the idea is that the Service needs a single institution to serve as the hub to aggregate advances in technology while developing doctrine that equates to increased battlefield lethality, while marrying all of the infantry courses to ensure that they are nested within each other. For academic purposes, this institution will be termed the "Infantry Center of Excellence" (ICoE).

The ICoE should be tasked with advancing the enlisted infantry PME continuum to achieve the asymmetric advantage outlined in the *MOC*.

The method in which the Marine Corps can best achieve the aim of creating enough qualified infantry squad leaders who are capable and winning in the FOE contains two central components—education and talent management. The Marine Corps must place a greater emphasis on the *education* of its infantry leaders versus simply separating them from their parent commands and training them as a cohort. The ICoE would be the mechanism that drives and oversees changes in *all* infantry course curricula.

There is no doubt that the establishment of the ICoE has the propensity to cause social strife within the Marine Corps. This discord would manifest due to the perception that the Marine Corps is solely focused on the enhancement of one arm of the MAGTF. An example of this would be contentious articles written on the topic and verbal discourse among peers at resident PME courses. Conversely, it must be understood that the precedent was established in 1978 with the commissioning of Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron One (MAWTS-1).<sup>36</sup> Portions of MAWTS-1 mission statement read, "...to provide standardized advanced tactical training and certification...and to provide assistance in the development and employment of aviation weapons and tactics."<sup>37</sup> Additionally, Marine logisticians look to Marine Corps Logistics Operations Group (MCLOG) as the entity that "...facilitates logistics education and manages doctrine, training standards, tactics and institutional training programs in order to enhance combat preparation and performance of Logistics combat Element units in MAGTF operations."<sup>38</sup> The bottom line is that the establishment of the ICoE is to enhance the collective (infantry, GCE, and overall) combat effectiveness, not set one occupational field apart from the rest of the service.

It is evident that the Marine Corps concurs with some of the proposals brought forward by BGen Wortman 10 years ago as evident in the 2015 introduction of the “QH” PEF code, as mentioned in the introduction. However, given its current trajectory, the program is destined to fail due to its poor messaging and general lack of understanding. The proposed change therefore begins with communication. Similar to when a detachment from the Ground Combat Element Branch visited each base and station to unveil the SLDP, the ICoE should take the lead in educating commanders and senior enlisted Marines, as well as recommending best practices on how this program should be managed. For example, regimental and battalion operations chiefs allocate, track, and oversee these Marines’ progress and education to ensure they are properly developed. The second modification to this program entails establishing a minimum age requirement of 22, which would allow for the squad leader candidate to reach full maturity by the time he enters the Operating Forces. The final alteration pertains to the minimum GT score. Referencing Table 1, which considers the other Armed Services’ standing of combat arms GT scores, the minimum requirement for a U.S. Army Ranger is 105 on the low end, while a U.S. Navy SEAL tops out at 110. Therefore, the proposed minimum GT score a Marine squad leader candidate should be 105 to ensure the applicant possesses the mental capacity to thrive in an uncertain, dynamic environment.

The SLDP has excellent intentions. However it is an inadequate fix and not the only method by which the Marine Corps can cultivate professional small-unit infantry leaders. According to MARADMIN 387/17, which provides the guidance for the SLDP in FY18, the objective is to achieve provide one SLDP Marine per platoon for a total of 15 per battalion, while indicating that this number can increase to 20 per battalion once *Marine Corps Force 2025* goes into effect.<sup>39</sup> The reality of this is that the Marine Corps is only going to invest in three SLDP rifle squad leaders per company, one per platoon. Would an aviation squadron be combat effective if it had only 33% of its aviators qualified? While SLDP targets NCOs who

have three to six years of service, the Marine Corps should commit to the development those infantrymen assigned to Marine Corps Security Force units.

The Service has a few burgeoning programs that have been implemented without the collective understand or oversight. However, none of the current initiatives capitalize on the hundreds of talented infantrymen departing their tours aboard Naval installations to join infantry battalions each year. These first-term, entry-level infantrymen serving as Marine Security Force guards are required to remain aboard in these installations for 24 months, after they attend a 33-training day Basic Security Guard Course in Chesapeake, Virginia. While serving in this capacity, these Marines inevitably advance in rank, often arriving in the Operating Forces as a corporal or sergeant. While the experiences and level of training these Marines receive are varied due to many factors, this paper will highlight two—personnel assignments and training/resources allocation.

Much like officers have the option to conduct career- and intermediate-level education through blended-seminar programs, the Marine Corps should view the infantrymen serving as Marine Security Force guards in the same light, through a 24-month training continuum that certifies the Marine as an infantry squad leader prior to integration into the Operating Forces.

The young enlisted infantryman arrives for his first assignment eager to learn and ready to train. However, many of those charged with leading him are unqualified and hamstrung by the lack of resources and training venues. The Marine Corps must accept these detachments for what they are—a pool of potential frontline leaders—and resource them accordingly. The Marine Corps is slowly trending toward deviating from the way it previously staffed these Monitored Command Codes (MCCs), and has begun slating them with proven, competent leaders who can mentor and develop these young men into capable infantrymen; however, this is not the standard.<sup>40</sup> The institution owes these commands the personnel, resources, and

venues to execute essential training. These detachments are fertile soil to churn out quality infantry leaders.

The 8152 MOS of Marine Security Force Guard has long been an afterthought, marginalized once they enter the Operating Force. This pool of talent must be nurtured and developed by infantry professionals. Manpower Management must limit the number of qualified infantry NCOs assigned to the traditional SDA and reallocate them to the two Security Force Battalions at Bangor, Washington, and Kings Bay, Georgia. These two commands need to be filled with 0913s, Marine Combat Instructors, in place of the various MOSs currently assigned to these commands. This would allow these two units to build a professional cadre that would be the backbone and trainers of these two AITB ancillaries. Manpower Management must also fill the officer and SNCO line numbers with infantry mavens. It is not imperative that the O-5 commanders at these installations are infantry officers, but it would certainly aid in advancing this effort. What the commander must be able to do is interface with the United States Navy leadership to establish expectations and provide a balance as it pertains to the units' assigned mission and the secondary mission of developing frontline combat leaders.

Headquarters Marine Corps must also establish formalized agreements with both Joint Base Fort Lewis-McChord, Washington, and Fort Stewart, Georgia, to ensure access to adequate training facilities to conduct the prescribed training. Additionally, training resources and ammunition allocation must be re-examined to ensure that these units are equipped to perform required training.

These AITB ancillaries' syllabi, developed by ICoE, should nest with those of Infantry Officer Course, Infantry Unit Leader Course, Advanced Infantry Marine Course, and Infantry Small Unit Leader Course. These institutions must be viewed as a 24-month progressive

course, concluding with producing a certified Infantry Squad Leader. This would alleviate the need to send Marines off the installation to either of the AITBs. As this program matures and is validated, this model could be replicated at other commands where first-term enlisted infantry are assigned, such as the Fleet Anti-terrorism Security Team Companies and at Marine Barracks, Washington, DC.

## **Conclusion**

*“Like war itself, our approach to warfighting must evolve. If we cease to refine, expand, and improve our profession, we risk being outdated, stagnant, and defeated.”<sup>41</sup>*

—Gen Al Gray

In the *Message to the Force 2017: Seize the Initiative*, Gen Neller states, “We have to continue to adapt, innovate, and change to meet future threats. We must always challenge the status quo and ask ourselves: Are we doing the right things? Are we doing them in the right way? What do we need to do differently? We need to approach our challenges with humility, an open mind, and a burning desire to win.”<sup>42</sup> Encouragingly, the 13-year academic insurgency undertaken by infantrymen, coupled with various studies and working groups, seem to have finally gained traction. The DC, PP&O, LtGen Brian D. Beaudreault, designated infantry squad leader staffing as his number one priority for the 2–17 Ground Board.<sup>43</sup> The Marine Corps cannot afford to wait to 2025 to meet the aims of the *MOC*. The Marine Corps must invest in its frontline combat leader now. For too long the Marine Corps has gambled with its most precious asset—the individual Marine.

The Marine Corps must commit to the establishment of the ICoE to serve as the focal point for the modernization of the infantry and be the entity tasked with developing the infantry community’s core curriculum, centered on succeeding in the FOE. Rightfully so, the Service has embraced technology and developed impressive capabilities that aim to provide friendly forces with an asymmetrical advantage on the battlefield; however, if we do not alter

our accessions and training, we will be unable to maximize the lethality of tomorrow's Marines on the battlefield. The Service must make the management of its infantry leader talent a priority, particularly as various programs are implemented and mature. Finally, while acknowledging that the SLDP provides a limited solution, the Marine Corps should recognize it has neglected a deep pool of talent—Marine Security Force guards—and invest in them in preparation to fight and win.

While this paper does not present the exclusive solution to resolve this protracted problem, its objective is to establish a framework upon which to build. Further study and analysis is essential to move any proposal forward. There is a Commandant of the Marine Corps–directed, Service-level operational planning team conducting a complete assessment across the doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and criteria on this exact topic. Unless the points brought forward in this paper are considered, the infantry squad leader, and the infantry community as a whole, will likely not possess the critical skills necessary for success on the battlefields of tomorrow.

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<sup>1</sup> Gen Robert B. Neller, *Marine Corps Operating Concept: How an Expeditionary Force Fights and Wins in the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 2016), 8.

<sup>2</sup> LtCol James W. Lively, “Ground Board 2–17, Squad Leader Staffing Topic” (unpublished information paper, January 4, 2018), Microsoft Word file, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Gen Charles C. Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 83, no. 1 (1999), 20–21.

<sup>4</sup> Gen Michael W. Hagee and United States Marine Corps, *A Concept for Distributed Operations. Marine Corps Operating Concepts for a Changing Security Environment*, (Washington, DC: Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 2005), 99.

<sup>5</sup> “Distributed Operations: Communications, Logistics, Education, and Training.” Naval Research Advisory Committee Report. Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Research, Development and Acquisition). (Washington, DC: July 2006), 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>10</sup> MajGen Robert B. Neller, “A Commitment to Squad Leaders,” unpublished paper, July 2007, Microsoft Word file.

<sup>11</sup> United States Marine Corps, *Developing Small Unit Leaders: The Strategic Corporal and the Infantry Squad Leader*, (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Combat Development Command, 2011), vii.

<sup>12</sup> Gen Robert B. Neller, *Marine Corps Operating Concept: How an Expeditionary Force Fights and Wins in the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 2016), 22.

<sup>13</sup> *Posture of the Department of the Navy: Statement before the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate, 115th Cong., 1st Sess., (2017)* (statement of Gen Robert B. Neller, Commandant, United States Marine Corps).

<sup>14</sup> Data collected by the Infantry Advocate via the 2d Marine Division G-3 on January 10, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> LtCol James W. Lively, “Ground Board 2-17, Squad Leader Staffing Topic, Enclosure 2: 2008-2017: Summary of Ground Board Topics Addressing Squad-level Manning and Training” (unpublished information paper, January 4, 2018), Microsoft Word file.

<sup>16</sup> Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies, and Operations, Ground Combat Element Branch, *Ground Board 2-17 Report*, (Washington, DC: United States Marine Corps, 201), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1, Warfighting*, 1989, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Gen Michael W. Hagee, “33rd Commandant of the Marine Corps Updated Guidance (The 21st Century Marine Corps—Creating Stability in an Unstable World),” MARADMIN 018/05, April 18, 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Gen Joseph F. Dunford, *36th Commandant’s Planning Guidance: Innovate, Adapt, and Win* (Washington, DC: Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 2005), 5.

<sup>20</sup> Gen Robert B. Neller, *Marine Corps Operating Concept: How an Expeditionary Force Fights and Wins in the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, 2016), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies, and Operations, Ground Combat Element Branch, *Ground Board 2-17 Report* (Washington, DC: United States Marine Corps, 201), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps, “Military Occupational Specialties Manual,” NAVMC 1200.1C, April 17, 2017, <http://www.trngcmd.marines.mil/Portals/207/Docs/wtbn/MCCMOS/FY18%20MOS%20Manual.pdf?ver=2017-04-26-122216-913>.

<sup>23</sup> LtCol Christian F. Wortman, “Operationalize Distributed Operations: Enlisted Manpower Requirement and Solutions,” *Marine Corps Gazette* (November 2007): 83.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Mr. Mark Meier (Marine Corps Recruiting Command PEF expert), discussion with author, March 7, 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, MARADMIN 344/17: “FY18 Enlisted Retention Goals,” June 30, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Data collected by the Infantry Advocate via the 2d Marine Division G–3 on January 10, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Gen Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., *36th Commandant’s Planning Guidance: Innovate, Adapt, and Win* (Washington, DC: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, 2005), 6.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> United States Marine Corps, School Of Infantry–East, “Advanced Infantry Training Battalion,” *Infantry Small Unit Leaders Course*, last modified August 4, 2016, <http://www.trngcmd.marines.mil/Units/South-Atlantic/SOI-E/Units/Advanced-Infantry-Training-Battalion/Infantry-Small-Unit-Leaders-Course/>.

<sup>33</sup> Gen Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., *36th Commandant’s Planning Guidance: Innovate, Adapt, and Win*. (Washington, DC: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, 2005), 6.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> United States Army, “U.S. Army Fort Benning and The Maneuver Center of Excellence,” *Mission and Vision*, last modified March 13, 2018, <http://www.benning.army.mil/About/Mission.html>.

<sup>36</sup> United States Marine Corps, “Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron One,” *Squadron History* <http://www.29palms.marines.mil/Units/Marine-Aviation-Weapons-and-Tactics-Squadron-One/History/>.

<sup>37</sup> United States Marine Corps, “Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron One,” *Our Mission*, <http://www.29palms.marines.mil/Units/MAWTS1/>.

<sup>38</sup> United States Marine Corps, “Marine Corps Logistics Operations Group,” *Mission*, <http://www.29palms.marines.mil/Units/Marine-Corps-Logistics-Operations-Group/>.

<sup>39</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, MARADMIN 387/17: “Fiscal Year 2018 Squad Leader Development Program Guidance,” July 24, 2017.

<sup>40</sup> CWO4 Gordon J. Hay (Marine Corps Security Force Regimental Gunner), discussion with author, February 15, 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1, *Warfighting*, 1989, 6.

<sup>42</sup> Gen Robert B. Neller, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Message to the Force 2017*:

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*“Seize the Initiative”* (Washington, DC: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, 2017), 3.

<sup>43</sup> LtCol James W. Lively, “Ground Board 2–17, Squad Leader Staffing Topic” (unpublished information paper, January 4, 2018), Microsoft Word file, 2.

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