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MARSOC faces challenging Special Operations Officer retention issues that can only be mitigated by understanding the current problem, actively taking measures to understand both the active duty and separated population, and establishing policies for retention that yield positive results over time. This paper will be organized into six sections that outline who MARSOC and the Special Operations Officer are, how one becomes a Special Operations Officer and why the issue is important, why Special Operations Officers leave, how MARSOC can find a solution to why Special Operations Officers leave through a survey, and potential solutions that may be options for MARSOC pending survey results. This paper will illuminate MARSOC's current problem and identify the best options for gathering quantitative and qualitative data to inform decision makers on the best method for proceeding in the future towards correcting retention deficiencies in its officer population.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

MARSOC Special Operation Officer Retention Challenges: A Method to Find a Solution

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

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Executive Summary

Title: MARSOC Special Operation Officer Retention Challenges: A Method to Find a Solution

Author: Major Spencer Everingham

Thesis: MARSOC faces challenging Special Operations Officer retention issues that can only be mitigated by understanding the current problem, actively taking measures to understand both the active duty and separated population, and establishing policies for retention that yield positive results over time.

Discussion: This paper will be organized into six sections that outline who MARSOC and the Special Operations Officer are, how one becomes a Special Operations Officer and why the issue is important, why Special Operations Officers leave, how MARSOC can find a solution to why Special Operations Officers leave through a survey, and potential solutions that may be options for MARSOC pending survey results. This paper will illuminate MARSOC's current problem and identify the best options for gathering quantitative and qualitative data to inform decision makers on the best method for proceeding in the future towards correcting retention deficiencies in its officer population.

Recommendation: It is recommended that MARSOC conduct data analysis through the conduct of both active duty and separated officer surveys to identify causes for separation. Additional recommendations include improved manpower policies and procedures for the monitoring of the officer population, and improved manpower policies that will benefit talent management within the MARSOC enterprise.

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DISCLAIMER

THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

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Introduction:

In 2006, then Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld ordered the United States Marine Corps (USMC) to create a unit to contribute Marines to the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM).¹ Thus, then Commandant of the Marine Corps General Hagee activated United States Marine Forces Special Operations Command, known today as MARSOC. While the youngest of the Special Operations Forces (SOF) that contributes to the joint SOCOM force at thirteen years of existence, MARSOC has quickly established itself as equally capable in its assigned tasks amongst its USSOF brethren. MARSOC has shared the same hardships as other service SOF, fought in the same battles, deployed at an equal pace, and continued to grow to its fully authorized strength. This has not however, been without challenge, and MARSOC is increasingly facing a specific problem with retention amongst its officer ranks.

The US Department of Defense carefully assesses, selects, and then specifically trains Special Operations Forces at significant cost. Unlike other SOF components within the USSOCOM enterprise, MARSOC does not allow for officers to join its ranks until that officer has first completed an operational tour within the larger USMC formation. This means that an officer in MARSOC will not “begin” his career until at a minimum he has completed four years of service. Then, he invests an additional 12-18 months participating in SOF baseline training before he fully earns his new Primary Military Occupational Specialty (PMOS) as a Special Operations Officer (SOO). The crisis that MARSOC currently faces is that this officer is increasingly deciding to leave the service upon completion of his first prescribed tour with MARSOC at approximately the 8-12 year mark of the officer’s career. Though an officer’s determination to leave the service at that approximate Time in Grade (TIG) is not extraordinary,

¹ Headquarters, Marine Special Operations Command. MARSOF Pub 1. Camp Lejeune, NC. <https://marsoc.sof.socom.mil/sites/mrtc/TEB/SitePages/Reference%20Library.aspx>. 1-4.

the rates of MARSOC SOOs choosing to leave is. This has created a challenge for MARSOC in fully reaching its operational growth at significant cost. MARSOC as an organization must understand why its junior field-grade officer population is determining to leave the service at disproportionate rates and take corrective measures immediately to stop the trend.

1. Who is MARSOC and the Special Operations Officer (SOO)?

MARSOC is still very much in its infancy and still experiencing growing pains as it continues to evolve in its formative years. MARSOC's creation was in large part due to the overtaxing of the USSOCOM force during the height of the Global War on Terrorism due to operations occurring simultaneously across the globe while also in Declared Theaters of Armed Conflict (DTAC) in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Recently, as global conflict has dissipated to more manageable levels for the SOF force, many in the SOCOM community opined that MARSOC would no longer be a required contributor to the SOCOM force. Largely, pundits argued that given its relatively small size, and increased Department of Defense implemented demands for optimizing the force due to cost-saving measures, MARSOC is redundant and unnecessary. (See figure 1 for service contributions to USSOCOM enterprise). However, both the SOCOM commander and Commandant of the Marine Corps have repeatedly discredited this thought. General Thomas, the 11th SOCOM commander stated about MARSOC shortly before retiring in 2019, "There are still skeptics out there but I'm here to tell you emphatically that 12 years after the experiment, you are no longer an experiment," and speaking to MARSOC, "You, members of this formation, have been integral to so many successes (Special Operations

Command) has enjoyed over so many years.”² Similarly, Gen. Berger the current Commandant of the Marine Corps during his 2019 confirmation testimony to Senator Richard Blumenthal, D-New York, when asked about whether Marine Corps Special Operations Command should be “disestablished,” as was recommended in a recent think tank article stated, “At this stage they have developed farther, faster than most thought possible,” and, “I think they’re vital. I think the (Special Operations Forces) and the command are better with them there.”³ Thus, with backing from both the USMC administrative command and USSOCOM operational command, it is safe to assume that MARSOC will continue to be a relevant contributor to both the Marine Corps and SOCOM for years to come. MARSOC must then strengthen its officer corps to remain relevant within the Marine Corps and SOCOM.

² Jeanette Phippen. “MARSOC sees Change of Command.” *JD News*.

<https://www.jdnews.com/news/20180810/marsoc-sees-change-in-command>.

³ Todd South. “Next Marine commandant says MARSOC is ‘vital’ to the Corps and US special operations.” *Marine Corps Times*. <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2019/04/11/next-marine-commandant-says-marsoc-is-vital-to-the-corps-and-us-special-operations/>.

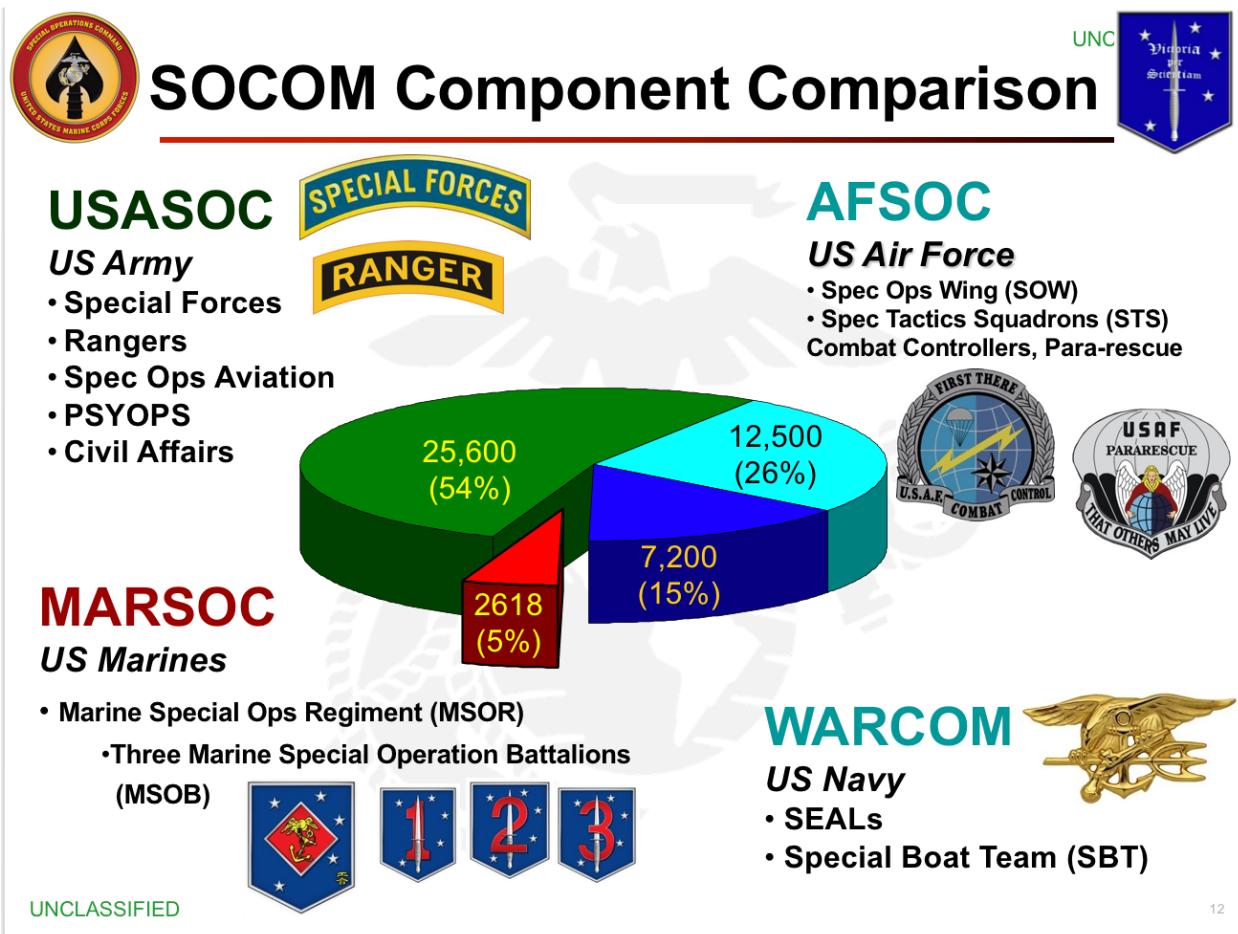


Figure 1. SOCOM Component Comparison

Source: Headquarters, Marine Special Operations Command, *SOCOM and MARSOC Organization and Missions* (Brief, Camp Lejeune, NC, May 2017), Slide 12.

2. Becoming a Special Operations Officer

Becoming a SOO is an incredibly demanding process for both MARSOC and the individual officer. To screen for recruitment to attend an Assessment and Selection (A&S), officers must have a minimum GT score of 110 on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), have a minimum Physical Fitness Test (PFT) score of 235, be able to pass the MARSOC swim assessment, meet the MARSOC medical screening criteria, and be able to

obtain and maintain a secret clearance.⁴ These are the minimum standards required to be invited to attend A&S. Most competitive candidates greatly exceed these minimum standards and typically also possess operational deployment experience. Once invited to A&S, officers screen in a highly competitive environment that is, "... a mentally and physically challenging evaluation that enables MARSOC to identify Marines that have attributes compatible with special operations missions and the MARSOC way of life."⁵ Upon selection at A&S (which historically sees officer attrition of 50%), officers are then slated to attend the next phase of their training, the Individual Training Course (ITC) where newly selected officers and enlisted learn the basics of becoming a Marine Special Operator over a ten-month period. From this point, remaining officers will then attend the MARSOC Team Commander's Course (MTCC) and earn the new PMOS of 0370 before attending follow on training and assuming command of their first operational team. (See figure 2 for standard pipeline of MARSOC SOO). In total, an average Marine Corps officer spends over one year becoming a SOO at an approximate investment of \$1.2 million dollars by MARSOC.

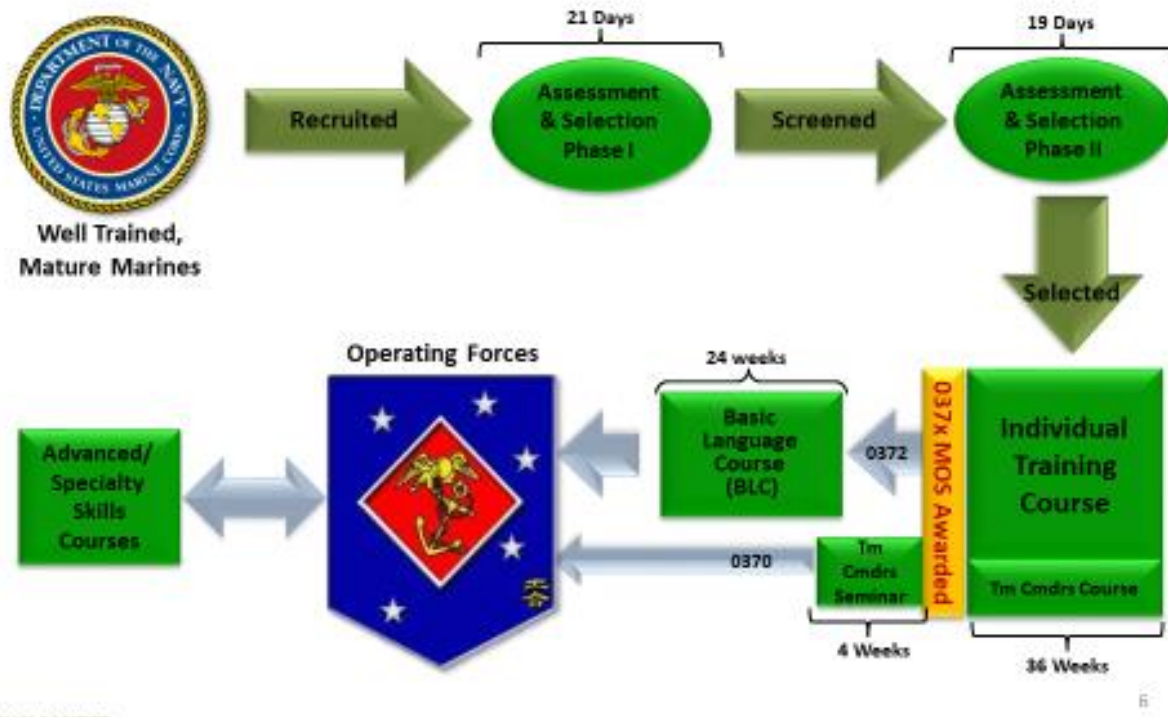
⁴ Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command. *MARSOC.COM*. <https://marsoc.com/cso-soo-details>.

⁵ *Ibid.*, *MARSOC.COM*.



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(U) Critical Skills Operator (CSO) and Special Operations Officer (SOO) Training Pipeline



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Figure 2. CSO / SOO Training Pipeline

Source: Headquarters, Marine Special Operations Command, *MARSOC Command Brief* (Brief, Camp Lejeune, NC, Sep 2018), Slide 6.

Individual Reasons for Choosing to Become a SOO:

Marine Corps officers have many reasons for choosing to leave their chosen professions and becoming a SOO. In 2013, author Dick Couch was granted unprecedented access to join, learn, and then publish an account of those men chosen to become MARSOC Raiders.⁶ In his book,

⁶ In 2015, MARSOC was granted authorization to label all who served within MARSOC as “Raiders” by the Commandant of the Marine Corps. This is similar culturally to the moniker used by Naval Special Warfare Command for their Special Operators, commonly referred to as

“Always Faithful, Always Forward,” Couch describes in depth the MARSOC Raider selection process and describes reasons why officers choose to enter into the selection pipeline. He notes reasons such as additional pay, the physical challenge, duty in a small unit, special equipment, the chance to serve in an elite unit, and so on. Almost every officer identifies two main reasons for wanting to join MARSOC – to escape an over burdensome bureaucracy that exists in the larger conventional Marine Corps, and an opportunity to lead Raiders in combat.⁷

Aspirations of the Individual SOO:

At induction, it is intuitive to surmise why Marine Officers want to join MARSOC. Many join the Marine Corps seeking the thrill of combat and actively seek the opportunity to lead Marines in this environment. However, many officers instead grapple with unfulfilled expectations as they progress through the Marine Corps’ system unable to achieve that initial goal. MARSOC SOO’s chance for leading men in combat operations is highest when he is a Captain. His opportunities decrease with each promotion because of mandated promotion policies set forth in the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA) of 1980, requiring the SOO to assume billets further from combat operations. Most simplistically, DOPMA mandates that officers continue to promote to the next higher grade in line with their peers’ Time In Grade (TIG), regardless of their individual accomplishments or desires, or face the alternative of getting out of the service.⁸ This mandated policy of progression has caused officers to “rise up” or “get

SEALs. The Raider moniker has historical and cultural lineage back to WWII and the first Marine Special Operators who operated at that time.

⁷ Dick Couch. *Always Faithful, Always Forward: The Forging of a Special Operations Marine*. First edition. (New York: Berkley Caliber, 2014), 58-59.

⁸ Defense Officer Personnel Management Act of 1980. S. 1918. 96th Cong., S. Report 96-375; H. Report 96-1462. 12/12/1980. Public Law 96-513. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/96th-congress/senate-bill/1918>.

out” as stated by author and economist Tim Kane in his work, “*Bleeding Talent: How the Military Mismanages Great Leaders and Why It’s Time for a Revolution*”.⁹ As illustrated below (Figure 3), typical promotion guidelines require the SOO, like all other officers to continue progressing in their career in predictable upward steps, often contrary to what the Marine SOO desires. Indeed, MARSOC has collected data from every recruit who has ever shown interest in become a Marine Raider and the data suggests that, particularly when it comes to officers, the desire to become a SOO is principally founded in the desire to serve in combat, towards an admirable cause, with others of high caliber – not because of a concern for promotion. Admittedly, MARSOC must view these data results cautiously as respondents potentially presented biased responses (this paper will address this in subsequent chapters). Regardless of their true incoming intentions, prospective SOO’s must understand that a paradoxical conflict will emerge at the crucial point following a SOO’s initial obligation. He faces a reality in which his chances for leading troops in combat will decrease while he simultaneously gains promotion.

DOPMA Official US Military Officer Promotion Rates		
Officer Pay Grade / Rank	Prmotion Percentage	Timing (Years of Service)
O-2	100	2yr
O-3	95	3.5 - 4yr
O-4	80	10 ~1yr
O-5	70	16 ~1yr
O-6	50	22 ~1 yr

Figure 3. DOPMA Official US Military Officer Promotion Rates¹⁰

⁹ Tim Kane. *Bleeding Talent: How the Military Mismanages Great Leaders and Why It’s Time for a Revolution*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 28.

¹⁰ GovTrack.us. (2020). S. 1918 — 96th Congress: Defense Officer Personnel Management Act. Retrieved from <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/96/s1918/text>.

Individual Training Course (ITC)... what they want to do:

Special Operations Officers continue to provide feedback through psychological screenings and surveys as they continue their progression through the Individual Training Course (ITC). By the time a SOO has graduated the ITC, he has overcome immense adversity through recruitment, selection, and four arduous phases of baseline SOF training that has stretched his capabilities to previously unknown preconceived limits. MARSOC has carefully recruited, assessed and selected him as a true elitist – through persistent attrition all along his path, he has become the **1** SOO out of an initial recruitment pool of approximately **100** qualified Marine officers. MARSOC’s Recruiting and Advertising Branch (R&A) data suggests that at this moment, with motivation and esprit de corps high, he intends to be a Raider for the rest of his career.¹¹ Again, MARSOC must consider the respondent’s motivations as R&A collects this data upon ITC completion, but, overwhelmingly respondents answer positively. Indeed, as noted by Dick Couch, through personal interviews of ITC Class 1-13, “The Marines I met in ITC, to a man, wanted to stay in the Marine Corps for a career... Special Operator was not just another bullet on their resume; this was to be their professional calling – as a Marine and a Marine Special Operator.” He further opines that, “...I can only imagine that the Command’s careful selection from a pool of career-minded warriors has to translate to a high number of ITC graduates staying in MARSOC for the duration.”¹² However, recent force separations data indicates this is not the case. MARSOC indeed is facing a potential crisis with the loss of disproportionately high numbers of SOO’s.

¹¹ MARSOC, Recruiting and Advertising Branch, “FY 2019 A&S Exit Survey Data.”

¹² Dick Couch. *Always Faithful, Always Forward: The Forging of a Special Operations Marine*, 295.

Why the problem is critical:

Due to its relatively small size, MARSOC is fortunate in that it can be exceptionally selective with the officers it brings to the organization. According to the 0370 / 0372 pamphlet released by MARSOC in 2017, only 197 total SOO's exist. Approximately twenty new officers join MARSOC yearly. According to current SOCOM / USMC manning requirements, the 0370 MOS is responsible for fulfilling Table of Organization (T/O) requirements for 171 billets at the O4 (Major), O5 (Lieutenant Colonel), and O6 (Colonel) level, of which 133 are currently manned. At the O3 (Captain) level MARSOC T/O is set at 76 SOO's, of which MARSOC currently mans 64. A significant gap exists in what MARSOC's officer manning level is and what the USMC and SOCOM expect that contribution to be. Many key billets go unfulfilled in Special Operations Task Forces (SOTF), Joint Special Operations Task Forces (JSOTF), Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOC), and various other locations within the USMC and SOCOM. This gap is severely inhibiting MARSOC's ability to gain and maintain placement and access for favorable relationship conditions, influence, and operational experience.

Most recent data collected from MARSOC G-1 (Administration) suggests that MARSOC indeed has a problem not only in making, but also retaining SOO's. The data further suggests that retention is increasingly trending negatively. Over the last six years, MARSOC has steadily produced roughly 20 SOO's per Fiscal Year (FY). As previously mentioned, MARSOC expects to retain a high proportion of these officers, either on par, or better, with other service and SOF-wide analytical trends and invests substantial capital to fully develop its officers. However, data shows that over the last six years MARSOC has lost an average of 15 SOO's / year for a year-year net gain of 5 SOO's. The high-water crisis mark hit in FY 2019 when MARSOC produced

16 SOO's while losing 21 active duty SOO's from the force.¹³ And though a certain percentage of these officers have separated the Marine Corps, or End of Active Service (EAS'd) due to reaching what Tim Kane refers to in his book *Total Volunteer Force* as the, "20 year cliff," the crisis is more immediately afflicting retention of officers at the 8-12 year service mark.¹⁴ A recent search of anticipated FY '20 SOO EAS data produced 2 officers intending to retire after 20+ years of service, while 10 officers intended to separate in the critical 8-12 year range of service.¹⁵ Though this snapshot in time is not in itself conclusive, the historical trends support the hypothesis that SOO's leave MARSOC at an alarming, unsustainable rate.

3. Why do Special Operations Officers leave?

Status of Force Survey:

In 2019, the Office of People Analytics (OPA) within the Department Manpower Data Center (DMDC) released the most recent Status of Forces Survey (SOFS-A) which gathered information from active duty members on a multitude of factors impacting the force.¹⁶ DMDC serves under the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OUSD) to collate personnel, manpower, training, financial, and other data for the Department of Defense (DoD).¹⁷ Thus, across the DoD,

¹³ Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command. *G-1: Retention statistics*. (Brief, Camp Lejeune, NC, 15 November, 2019). Slide 1.

¹⁴ Tim Kane. *Total Volunteer Force: Lessons from the US Military on Leadership Culture & Talent Management*. (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 2017), 176.

¹⁵ Pulled by Major Spencer Everingham on 17 January, 2020. from Marine Online's rank/MOS report at <https://mol.tfs.usmc.mil/mol/indview/RankMosView.do>. This data is simply a snapshot in time and is highly inaccurate from day-day as some intending to retire may show an EAS up to a year in advance while someone separating may show an EAS date of as little as 3 mos.

¹⁶ Department Manpower Data Center (DMDC). Office of People Analytics. Status of Forces Survey-Active (SOFS-A) results. <https://dhra.deps.mil/sites/OPA/opa-survey/SitePages/Home.aspx>.

¹⁷ DMDC. https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dmdc_overview.jsp. Accessed 01 February 2020.

Other SOF service specific data:

In 2019, RAND released a DoD funded report specifically highlighting how the influx of increases to special pays and allowances would increase retention amongst Special Forces (SF) officers and Sea, Air, and Land (SEAL) officers. In that study, RAND highlighted other SOF service retention rates and deficiencies that MARSOC can use for comparison. Specifically, the SF officer community experiences an approximate retention rate of 80% at the 8-year mark of total service. At the 12-year mark this retention percent drops down to an approximate 50% retention rate. SEAL officers, comparatively, have an approximate retention rate of 70% at the 8-year mark of total service, and an approximate 50% rate at the 12-year mark.¹⁹ Thus, both comparative SOF services retain approximately between 50% - ~75% during the critical 8-12 year mark. Put another way, the SF and SEAL community loses approximately between 25% - 50% of its SOF officers. MARSOC's retention rates during this 8-12 year mark is substantially lower having never retained as high as 50% of its SOF officers. The very fact that the DoD funded this report as a research project signifies the severity of the situation for other SOF services. And, many authors have dedicated research papers to Army and Navy SOF retention issues. But no published reports have included MARSOC to date, with RAND specifically citing the relative youth of the organization for exclusion.²⁰ Knowing that other SOF services are facing similar retention challenges, MARSOC must similarly seek to identify these retention factors and immediately take corrective measures to retain quality SOO's.

¹⁹ Beth J. Asch, Michael G. Mattock, James Hosek, Shanthi Nataraj. *Assessing Retention and Special and Incentives Pays for Army and Navy Commissioned Officers in the Special Operations Forces*. (Santa Monica, CA, RAND publishing, 2019). 34-35. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1796.html.

²⁰ Ibid.

Common factors for individuals choosing to leave SOF:

Many published texts and reports provide hypothetical reasons for why SOF are leaving the service. These reasons vary significantly. In Tim Kane's book *Bleeding Talent*, an extensive survey done across a wide-ranging Army population indicated that the top four reasons Army officers, to include SOF, left the service was, "High op tempo during war, other life goals, family income, ... [but the top reason....] frustration with military bureaucracy."²¹ Though Tim Kane's research focused primarily on Army officers, SF officers provided correlating factors when surveyed in 2019 by the SF Branch of the Army's Human Resource Command. SF Branch identified the top reason SF officers choose to separate from the service were, 1) low interest in SF Major jobs, 2) frustration with bureaucracy, 3) lack of job satisfaction, and 4) family considerations.²² Interestingly, the SF Branch survey produced alternative results concerning the fourth highest-resulted answer in Tim Kane's research concerning high op tempo. He asked SF officers if a reduction in deployment tempo would have a positive or negative impact on their likelihood of remaining in the active service. Overwhelmingly, SF officers negatively viewed a reduction in op tempo, with 65% of respondents stating that it would have a negative impact on their likelihood of continuing service.²³

The 2019 SOFS-A survey added additional factors that may have impacted officers' decision to stay or separate from service to include family satisfaction, stress, and deployment challenges.²⁴ Other hypothesized reasons for separation based on the author's personal conversations with peers include; financial opportunities in the civilian sector, a lacked sense of

²¹ Tim Kane. *Bleeding Talent*, 98.

²² A.W. Simmons. *Branch Update: A Special Report on SF Talent Management*. (Army Human Resources Command, Special Forces,) 2019, 7.

²³ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁴ DMDC. Survey Results. <https://dhra.deps.mil/sites/OPA/opa-survey/SitePages/Home.aspx>.

mission accomplishment, unfulfilled expectations from higher command, a belief that their operational “warfighting” opportunities may have reached their end, and/or a belief that future potential for staff life in a bureaucratic system does not meet their desires for continued service. Additionally, a high proportion of MARSOC SOO’s deploy multiple times to combat zones. Thus, the author hypothesizes some additional conjectural reasons for separation may include; number of combat deployments, casualties witnessed on the battlefield, a persistent need to prove oneself as a relatively young SOF service still experiencing organizational growth, increased stress on married personnel, or mental or physical injury. Many potential factors could explain the decision to leave the Special Operations community. MARSOC SOO’s, contrary to other SOF organizations, decide to join SOF later in their careers that also could provide insights as to reasons for separation. Therefore, MARSOC must not solely rely on other services’ information for why SOF officers separate but must instead identify MARSOC specific reasons and actively seek to combat the variables it can influence to keep a higher percentage of SOO’s.

4. Survey Answer

MARSOC has yet to be included in any of the published exit interview surveys of either Special Operations Officers or specifically identified in any of the other DoD-wide or Marine centric exit interviews. To truly understand the answers for why SOO’s are departing the formation, MARSOC must conduct surveys of those departed to understand their reasons. MARSOC must also conduct surveys of active duty officers within the organization to understand if and why they intend to separate or continue to serve within the SOCOM enterprise. By identifying this information, MARSOC will be able to affect the variables in retention within their capability. Additionally, if trends emerge that align with other sister SOF services,

SOCOM writ-large may seek a solution through external measures that strengthen the force. The most immediate step MARSOC can take to inform decision makers at the highest level toward a corrective path is to conduct relevant surveys and provide analytical data that reveals the trends in force retention. However, because this population is still relatively small, MARSOC must ensure that it addresses all respondent anonymity concerns and designs a survey that accounts for potential social desirability bias responses to gain the most relevant information possible.

Survey design:

Inherently, survey designers must undertake a deliberate, systematic build to ensure that they eliminate designer biases and account for respondent social desirability bias before sending out a survey. Additionally, MARSOC survey designers need to understand that any potential survey concerning reasons for separation will be the first of its kind and potentially have far-reaching implications for the steady-state force. The potential for organizational change, based on respondent results, is very real as MARSOC continues to evolve its young force. Therefore, it is important to describe the potential missteps that may occur when undertaking this endeavor to ensure the developed survey achieves all its intentions. Specifically, MARSOC must account for social desirability bias, non-response error, a degree of sampling error, the importance of conducting mixed-method surveys, guarantees of anonymity validity, trustworthiness, and reliability; and determine the best method to continue a longitudinal multi-layered approach. If successful in initial design, MARSOC surveyors will establish a baseline product that they can easily replicate for years to come for the betterment of the organization. If designed properly, and effective in response leading to actionable information, MARSOC can share its survey model in the future with the USMC and SOCOM for similar retention or exit interview purposes.

Social Desirability Bias:

Many surveys need to be concerned with respondents wondering what is in it for them. The reality of any survey conducted by MARSOC concerning SOO retention is that most respondents, whether separated or still in the active duty force, will have little monetary or other tangible incentive for responding untruthfully, thus resulting in an ideal social exchange behavior. However, because of a lack of a tangible incentive, MARSOC will need to actively work to ensure it receives a sufficient response that can lead to actionable information. As Don Dillman describes in his book *Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*, “Actions are motivated by the return these actions are expected to bring and in fact, usually do bring, from others. The likelihood of responding to the request to complete a self-administered questionnaire, and in doing so accurately, is greater when the respondent trusts that the expected rewards of responding will outweigh the anticipated costs.”²⁵ Undoubtedly, any responses offered from SOO’s who have separated from the active service would not expect any tangible reward, but also would understand that responding in truth would also cost little. Therefore, MARSOC can reasonably assume that respondents would answer a self-administered questionnaire accurately. Though not quantifiable, again, MARSOC can reasonably assume that respondents would answer questions accurately with the belief that the reward for the organization, MARSOC, would improve based on truthful and accurate answers to any survey. The cost of responding is low, if not completely abolished, regarding responses from separated SOO’s. For those surveyed remaining on the active duty force, the reward substantially outweighs the cost, though surveyors must guarantee to this population complete assurance of marginalized cost. MARSOC must ensure that this population understands that all responses

²⁵ Don A. Dillman. *Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*. 2nd ed. (New York: Wiley, 2000), 27.

remain confidential and/or anonymous so that respondents can never infer that the organization used any potential response in a negative fashion towards the responding individual. By doing so, MARSOC will likely receive accurate feedback for how to improve from its active duty population. With both populations, MARSOC can minimize potential social desirability bias by ensuring confidentiality, explaining clearly the organizational benefit for accurate responses, and minimizing any pre-conceived notion that accurate response will negatively impact surveyed respondents in any way.

Non-Response Error:

In preparation for conducting surveys of both the separated and active duty SOO population, MARSOC must consider the potential for non-response and appropriately design and take active measures to prepare accordingly. As defined by J. Michael Brick, “non-response is defined as the failure to obtain a valid response from a sampled unit.”²⁶ Undoubtedly, non-response from the intended survey, whether in whole or with specific questions, will result in a loss of precision from the intended results. Therefore, it is imperative that MARSOC survey designers ensure that they inform potential respondents of the existence and importance of the survey for the community and eliminate potentially biased questions that could elicit non-response. As Brick further notes, the simplest way to prevent initial non-response is to ensure the sampled unit is contacted, and appropriately persuade the population of the validity of participation.²⁷ Though

²⁶ J. Michael Brick. “Unit nonresponse and weighting adjustments: A critical review”. *Journal of Official Statistics*, 29, 329-353. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jos-2013-0026>. (2013), 329.

²⁷ J. Michael Brick and Montaquila, J.M. “Nonresponse and Weighting”. *Handbook of Statistics. Sample Surveys: Design, Methods, and Applications*, D. Pfeffermann and C.R. Rao (eds). Vol. 29A. (Amsterdam: Elsevier-North Holland, 2009), 163 – 186.

non-contact has historically been a significant reason for non-response, survey populations have increasingly shifted to outright refusal for participation.

Further, a possibility exists that the designed MARSOC survey will result in specific item non-response error which Vera Toepoel describes as, “Individuals who fail to provide the answer to an individual question or item.”²⁸ Thus, MARSOC must also appropriately design a survey that will persuade respondents to provide candid and complete feedback.

MARSOC can take several measures to ensure non-response and item non-response do not threaten the validity or the reliability of the intended survey. First and foremost, MARSOC must identify eligible respondents, categorize them in appropriate respondent groups (active or separated), and make them feel that their input to the results will be important. This needs to occur upon initial setup and notification. MARSOC should utilize an online survey to increase responses given that the population size for the survey will inherently be small due to the nature of the SOO population. Recent analysis shows that non-response rates of online surveys is generally 10% less than other forms of collection means.²⁹ To increase the likelihood that MARSOC will receive responses from its intended population, MARSOC should initiate follow-up contact to ensure surveys have been received and are being completed along an established timeline. The best case scenario would be to notify the population of an impending survey, notify again once the survey has been distributed, and then again at a pre-determined time once the survey has been sent out to notify of an upcoming closeout date for response. Admittedly, non-response is far less likely from the active duty SOO population where the MARSOC Command Team can mandate completion. To minimize item non-response, MARSOC should

²⁸ Vera Toepoel. *Doing Surveys Online*. (Washington, DC: Sage Publishing, 2016), 9.

²⁹ Edith de Leeuw. *Counting and Measuring Online: The Quality of Internet Surveys*. BMS: Bulletin of Sociological Methodology / Bulletin De Méthodologie Sociologique, no. 114 (2012): 68-78. Accessed February 5, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/24311411.

utilize a focus group to test the intended survey to validate intended questions. MARSOC has thus far used focus groups to help draft intended questions and can gain much from getting feedback of the intended final survey. MARSOC can adequately reduce the potential of nonresponse with these recommended actions.

Degree of Sampling Error:

MARSOC is going to have a very small population of available SOO's and separated SOO's from which to conduct any conceived survey. Since this inherently small population will ultimately result in a small-scale study, MARSOC must consider the sampling frame, survey sample, and respondents in order to reduce sampling error and produce the best non-probabilistic sampling strategy. MARSOC will need to use reasoned logic and judgment to conduct purposive sampling. Lesley Andres in her work *Designing & Doing Survey Research* describes this as the "intentional, careful selection and matching of the sample to the study."³⁰ Further, she identifies the most logical design option for MARSOC to conduct an upcoming survey of its separated force as a "Snowball Sample," which is utilized in a non-probabilistic strategy when, "participants ...are part of [a] specialized group of individuals."³¹ Simply stated, a "Snowball Sample" is used when personal outreach of a specific population is required because of the uniqueness of the population sample. Though MARSOC has clearly identified pools of respondents in both its active duty and separated force, locating and identifying separated SOO's will require a snowball network. The MARSOC survey team will need to leverage friend and acquaintance networks to ensure it reaches all separated individuals for recruitment to participate

³⁰ Lesley Andres. *Designing & Doing Survey Research*. (London: Sage Publishing, 2012), 97.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

in the survey. Importantly, MARSOC must ensure it appropriately recruits a distributive survey sample of respondents to validate its received results.

MARSOC must also act to minimize sampling error. Defined, sampling error is, “a mismatch or lack of precision between the selected sample and the population to which the researcher wishes to generalize.”³² Because of its small-scale nature, minimizing the possibility of sample error is especially important. MARSOC can accomplish this in two ways. First, it can invite all SOO’s to participate from both the active duty and separated lists. Specific to the separated list, MARSOC must work diligently in the survey design phase to ensure it can identify and notify all potential respondents. If this is unfeasible, MARSOC must ensure it chooses an appropriate, relative sample. Simply notifying those SOO’s separated within the previous year, for example, would not provide a representative sample large enough that MARSOC can use for actionable information. For another example, if MARSOC only receives response from SOO’s who separated with over 5 combat deployments, undoubtedly a skewed sampling error would occur. If MARSOC is unable to contact all recently separated SOO’s, MARSOC must work to ensure that it considers a sample representative of the typical Raider experience. Second, MARSOC must follow up with its survey population to ensure it receives accurate feedback that they can use to make generalized statements with the received results.

Mixed-Method Survey & Degree of Interviewer Involvement:

MARSOC is interested in gathering both quantitative and qualitative data about why SOO’s separate from the service. One of the best methods to do so is by combining mixed methods to receive feedback. As Tashakkori and Teddlie outline in their work *Advances in Mixed Methods*

³² Ibid., 111.

Research: Theories and Applications, the purposes for utilizing a mixed method are to “complement, complete, develop, expand, corroborate/confirm, compensate, and/or diversify.”³³ Given the additive benefits of conducting a mixed method form of survey, MARSOC would be wise to combine an initial online survey with either follow-up telephone surveys or face-to-face interviews. Though conducting mixed-method research will require more time and resources on both the part of the researcher and the respondent, MARSOC would undoubtedly gain more actionable data to utilize for any long-term changes or recommendations concerning how to deal with the loss of SOO’s.

If MARSOC determines that it has the time and resources to conduct a mixed-method survey, which is highly recommended to maximize the opportunity to gather information to make sound decisions, another consideration will need to be the involvement of the interviewer. Some of the advantages, particularly if the interviewer can establish rapport, would be a common understanding of terminology and hardship (if a fellow MARSOC SOO), and the ability to ask open-ended and follow-on questions to get detailed qualitative responses. However, some disadvantages include the potential for leading questions, and the potential that the interviewee may not share otherwise personal or sensitive information. However, if an interview outline were drafted, vetted, and conducted by an unbiased interviewer who received good interview training, MARSOC would benefit immensely from conducting a mixed-method survey that included either personal face-to-face interviews or phone interviews as part of its survey process.

Guarantees of anonymity validity, trustworthiness, and reliability:

³³ Abbas Tashakkori, and Charles Teddlie. “Quality of inferences in mixed method research: Calling for an integrative framework”. In M. M. Bergman (ed.), *Advances in Mixed Methods Research*. (London: Sage Publishing, 2008), 103.

One of the most important contributors to ensuring honest survey responses for how to improve MARSOC SOO retention will be the assurance of privacy and confidentiality to the respondent population. If done appropriately, this will increase the likelihood for reliable response.

Furthermore, the survey respondents must believe that those administering the survey are in fact, trustworthy and will do what they state with the results. As noted in *Conducting Online Surveys*, “The important fact is not that researchers must promise anonymity; rather, what is essential is that if the promise is made, the researcher is obligated to take the necessary steps to ensure that identifying information about survey respondents is kept separate from their responses.”³⁴

Importantly, MARSOC researchers must make known what they hope to achieve with the survey up front, and assure potential respondents of both privacy and confidentiality. While privacy refers to the individual’s information, confidentiality would refer to the way MARSOC would treat the information.³⁵ MARSOC cannot erase all anonymity with an online survey, and if MARSOC conducts a mixed method survey, anonymity would not be possible. However, if MARSOC is up front with how it plans to use quantitative data as grouped inputs and separate qualitative vignettes without compromising privacy, it will increase the number of respondents who want to contribute to a common positive result.

Multi-layered approach (exit, 2yr, 5 yr.):

MARSOC can gain significantly from continuing to question why SOO’s choose to separate from the command. To this date, MARSOC has zero data to understand why its officers are leaving at such an alarming pace. Furthermore, though MARSOC asks questions of officers

³⁴ Valerie M. Sue, and Lois A. Ritter. *Conducting Online Surveys*. 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, 2012), 29.

³⁵ Vera Toepoel. *Doing Surveys Online*. 41.

during the recruitment and assessment process for why they want to become a Raider, those answers are never compared with why an officer chooses to separate and not currently shared with an officer's command during his tenure in MARSOC. Therefore, MARSOC must establish a baseline to begin compiling the data for why officers are leaving. Further, it should then check this data over multiple years to determine the long-term validity of the survey respondent's answers. Simply stated, a survey respondent may indicate one year after separation that he did so for "x" reason, but three years later realize he did it for "y." An initial baseline is undoubtedly important for MARSOC to identify if it has any persistent trends across its officer force. And, MARSOC must strive to identify separated SOO's across the span of a recommended five-year period.³⁶ This will provide initial data that MARSOC can assess for comparison at intervals of exit, two years, and five years. The only survey that MARSOC can mandate would be the exit survey, but if MARSOC pitches the survey program as providing continued value for years to come, this author believes that most will complete it again following separation.

Exit interview survey compared to entrance survey:

To truly understand where MARSOC can improve in officer retention it is imperative to have some comparative baseline for why officers initially join the organization. As previously described, SOO's make a substantial investment when they choose to become a part of MARSOC. Most do not do so with the intention of completing four to six years then separating from the service. MARSOC would potentially have to overcome substantial confidentiality and privacy issues if it pulled individual separating officer qualitative data to compare with entrance and exit surveys. This author does not recommend that, not only because of the confidentiality

³⁶ If MARSOC commits to the multi-layered approach, within 5 years it will increase the representative sample of the separated SOO population to nearly 100%.

and privacy issues, but also the burdensome time and resource constraint it would impose on the reviewer. However, MARSOC should compile aggregate, quantitative data from entrance survey data to determine what leading causes contribute to Marine officers who become Raiders deciding to embark on the journey. In this way, MARSOC can tailor questions on an exit survey to determine if they have met or failed to meet SOO expectations. For example, if 75 percent of entering officers consider going on deployment to combat as a top reason for joining MARSOC, it would be beneficial to add a question concerning number of combat deployments on an exit survey to determine if in fact the data proved that the expectation has been met of the separating SOO. Furthermore, by gathering entrance information from the SOO population, and comparing it to exit survey info, MARSOC can begin to understand more appropriately officer expectations and determine if they are fulfilling those wants and desires. If MARSOC values officer retention, this comparison may highlight a required adjustment to its officer recruitment strategy to match the reality painted by those separating SOO's. Regardless, comparing these surveys will shed light on those items most clearly at odds amongst the officer population.

Exit interview survey compared to active duty survey:

In as much as MARSOC needs to compare the reasons why officers choose to enter the organization and the special operations community, MARSOC also needs to gauge if it is meeting the expectations of its active duty SOO population. MARSOC will gain much from surveying its senior career grade and junior field grade officer population. Most importantly, MARSOC will be able to understand if it is, in fact, meeting the expectations of this population. Furthermore, if MARSOC compiles entrance quantitative data, and receives input from exit surveys, polling those SOO's on active duty will fill a critical gap that can inform decision

makers. MARSOC can additionally adjust specific survey questions to account for this population as well. For example, MARSOC can ask what it can do better to retain individuals, what is most important for retention to the surveyed individual, etc... By collecting this information, MARSOC can make more complete and informed decisions about how to best adjust its retention strategy for its officer population.

5. Potential solutions

MARSOC will face a challenging task trying to determine SOO retention strategies prior to conducting thorough survey analysis. However, several like organizations have conducted relevant research that MARSOC can use to inform survey design in the pursuit of gaining relevant information for future retention improvement decisions. Most specifically, and similarly, to the organization of MARSOC, analyzing US Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) and US Navy Special Warfare Command (WARCOM), to compare and learn best practices will be important. MARSOC has learned much from these organizations as it has established and progressed in its formation. In this same regard, MARSOC can now learn from its SOF partners for how the Army retains SF officers and how the Navy retains SEALs. MARSOC is aggressively conducting internal focus group sessions to accurately plan not only accurate survey questions, but also estimate potential solutions to the problem. In this way, prior to conducting data analysis from survey results, MARSOC can make educated estimates of potential solutions to its officer retention problem and frame survey questions accordingly.

What other SOF units currently do:

Most closely related in size and mission to MARSOC is the Naval Special Warfare (NSW) community. In a 2013 study, LCDR Scott noted that NSW was losing SEALs most significantly at the 8-16 years of service (YOS) mark. This time mark was identified as the grade of Lieutenant Commander with data showing a year-year loss of 10% of its SEAL officer force resulting in manning levels of 65%.³⁷ At the time, NSW was facing a severe officer manning challenge and needed to make significant change to its retention policies. NSW implemented several initiatives outlined in their *NSW Officer Detailing and Community Management Brief* for retention including: development of a mentorship program, developing a predictable deployment schedule, restructuring targeted retention bonuses, and reducing operational tempo.³⁸ These have achieved mixed results with SEALs indicating the unquantifiable mentorship program as the most significant contributor to increased retention. The SEAL organization is also the only SOF community that has additionally taken quantifiable measures to improve retention to include the use of Critical Skills Retention Bonuses.

The U.S. Department of Defense authorized Critical Skills Retention Bonus (CSRB) in 2005. To date, only the Navy has implemented the program for retention as part of its Special Warfare Officer Continuation Program (SWOCP). Though currently only utilized for Navy SOF officers with over 15 YOS, RAND concludes that an increase of dollar amount would result in an increased retention rate in the SEAL community of approximately 4%. Though 4% is insignificant, more strikingly, if a similar program was instituted for SF officers in the Army,

³⁷ Nathan A. Scott. "Models, Analysis, and Recommendations pertaining to the Retention of Naval Special Warfare's Mid-Level Officers." (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2013), 4-5.

³⁸ Jeromy Williams and Darin Evenson, "SEAL Officer (LCDR) Separations." *NSW Officer Detailing and Community Management Brief*, February 2013.

RAND concludes that the resultant increase in year-year retention would increase by 10.6%.³⁹ Admittedly, the RAND survey only studied the bonus pay impacts of SOF officers with over 15 years of SOF service, but, MARSOC could infer that similar bonuses offered to SOO's would increase retention. Additionally, MARSOC could assume that if applied to SOO's between the 8-12 year mark, when SOO's are not yet fully committed to reaching a 20-year retirement, and the prospects combat operations decreasing, retention would improve. MARSOC can utilize this information to ensure its designed survey asks about this retention strategy's impact.

Another critical component to SOO retention that will become clear through survey analysis will be work-life balance, flexible scheduling, and the impact of PERSTEMPO on officers within MARSOC. Most simplistically stated, PERSTEMPO defined is, a comparison of days not in home port (home station) to days in home port (home station) over a specific period. The intended PERSTEMPO threshold from USSOCOM is not to exceed a 1:2 ratio, with intended goals to achieve a 1:3 ratio.⁴⁰ In 1999, the Army Research Institute (ARI) produced an exceptionally comprehensive report examining the impacts of PERSTEMPO on numerous factors to include work-life balance, marriage stress, and retention rates. Though dated, their findings indicate that increased time away from home did not negatively impact retention of SOF officers but did negatively impact Marines. In 1999, MARSOC did not exist, but the report did conduct a thorough survey of Army SOF and published both the questions utilized and respondent answers.⁴¹ Four significant results manifested during the survey: 1) lack of chain of

³⁹ Beth J. Asch, Michael G. Mattock, James Hosek, Shanthi Nataraj. *Assessing Retention and Special and Incentives Pays for Army and Navy Commissioned Officers in the Special Operations Forces*. 37-39.

⁴⁰ Major Everingham personal understanding of current USSOCOM policy regarding PERSTEMPO based on attendance at SOCOM CDR conference 2018-2019.

⁴¹ Paul J. Sticha, Robert Sadacca, Ani S. DiFazio, C. Mazie Knerr, Paul F. Hogan, and Marisa Diana. "Personnel Tempo: Definition, Measurement, and Effects on Retention, Readiness, and

command support was overwhelmingly negatively reported, 2) insufficient time between deployments was negatively reported, 3) unit or installation activities to support the family had substantial positive relationships with retention, family factors and satisfaction, and 4) perception of the level of unit support provided when job demands conflicted with personal responsibilities was positive.⁴² MARSOC can utilize this survey as an example for best molding survey questions based on Army SOF respondents input when creating its own future survey.

Many other methods currently exist to retain highly specialized officers in the SOF community. Another important, recent contribution to maintaining SOF officers is to offer competitive selection to intermediate professional military education. Until recently, MARSOC SOO's were severely behind their counterparts in this regard. From FY 2015-2018 MARSOC averaged 3 SOO's getting selected yearly to attend intermediate level education (ILE). That number has since increased in FY 2019-2020 to 6 SOO selections per year. However, unfortunately, MARSOC has also lost at least 1 officer allotment per class due to separation, thus negating an alternative officer intending on staying in active service from completing school. Facing similar ILE challenges in their respective SOF services, both the Army and Navy afford their officers opportunities to take sabbaticals to obtain their master's degrees. As Tim Kane notes, "each service currently has authority to offer sabbaticals, but full flexibility requires broader reforms to compensation, promotion, and assignment processes."⁴³ Though exact numbers are unknown at this time of how many SF and SEAL officers are afforded the opportunity to take sabbaticals each given year to earn their master's degrees, the number is

Quality of Life." U. S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral & Social Sciences (ARI). (Alexandria, VA, 1999), 41-42.

⁴² Ibid., 47.

⁴³ Tim Kane. *Total Volunteer Force*. 62.

substantial enough that the author knows several.⁴⁴ Most importantly, MARSOC does not currently offer this program to SOO's. If survey results show this as a potential to assist with retention efforts, MARSOC should actively pursue utilizing this program to not only boost the level of education in its officer corps, but also help retain its best and brightest officers.

What MARSOC should do regardless of survey outcome:

In conducting initial preparation for the conduct of this research the author identified several shortcomings that MARSOC can address regardless of survey outcomes. First, MARSOC does not maintain active databases that show year-year attrition by TIS. A challenge with conducting this research has been identifying those officers that have separated during the target year groups and determining if it in fact is facing a retention problem. MARSOC does retain separated and retirement information, but, does not maintain year-to-year gain/loss information. MARSOC additionally does not have an active database listing those officers that have served in MARSOC who have now separated from the service organized by time. Another positive change that can occur regardless of survey results is that MARSOC can implement a policy for the conduct of exit interviews of its officer population. It should be mandated that regardless of reason for separation, an exit interview should be conducted and an exit survey (as will be shown in Appendix A) should be administered so MARSOC can continue to collect information to inform the command on its own command climate. Finally, MARSOC must continue to evolve its officer manpower policies to ensure the afford SOO's opportunities for ILE, command, and assignment in accordance with the desires of the SOO and the needs of MARSOC. MARSOC's recent O4 Command Slate Board is a positive sign that MARSOC considers talent management a

⁴⁴ Major Everingham personal knowledge of SF and SEAL officers who have attended and graduated from graduate level education while on sabbatical from SOF service.

high priority and must expand this initiative to include the discriminant slating of officers across all positions.

6. Conclusion

MARSOC is undoubtedly facing a challenging problem with Special Operations Officer retention that until recently has remained mostly hidden or ignored. Due to high operational tempo, rapid turnover at the highest echelon of component command, and faulty manpower management and policies, MARSOC did not realize until recently it had this vast of a problem. However, other SOF services have amplified the illuminated reality that MARSOC is currently facing with its own recent officer retention concerns. MARSOC has realized it must immediately seek to solve its officer retention strategy as it increasingly faces challenges manning field-grade officer billets.

To understand the breadth of the problem MARSOC faces, it must understand the officers it chooses to assess and select to understand their motivations and desires. MARSOC must know if it is properly recruiting through its tactics, techniques, and procedures. Becoming a Marine Raider is not an easy process. If it is true that most join with the intent to make the service a career, MARSOC must understand from the onset where these officers' minds change. Further, MARSOC must understand if it is meeting those same SOO expectations as these officers progress through ITC and as they gain the 0370 MOS and become a Raider. Then, MARSOC must understand what impacts are affecting these officers as they continue their initial tours with the operating forces. In this manner, MARSOC will be able to determine if it in fact can achieve more positive retention of its officers.

The crisis is not particularly uncommon at this current time amongst the SOF enterprise. As indicated, both Army SF and Navy SEAL communities similarly face retention concerns particularly with the senior company level/junior field-grade officer ranks. However, as shown in this paper, this attrition truly is an anomaly when compared against retention data within both the DoD and Marine Corps. Thus, MARSOC can look to its sister-SOF services for potential solutions to reduce its loss of force. And, as evidenced, sister-SOF services offer certain solutions that help with retention. However, to truly understand the reasons why SOO's are separating and take targeted action against this loss, MARSOC must conduct research to determine the answer from its own force of current active duty and separated SOO's.

In designing a survey to answer what MARSOC can do to better retain SOO's, MARSOC must be very deliberate in its initial survey design. Furthermore, MARSOC must understand that it will need to design separate surveys for its active duty and separated populations. In both surveys, survey designers will need to consider commonalities and will need to tailor certain questions to eliminate the potential for social desirability bias, nonresponse error, and a degree of sampling error. MARSOC will need to do the hardest work during survey design to ensure questions are unbiased, they have a representative population willing to respond free of honesty constraints, and they have identified a population willing to provide objective response without bias. Further, as this research suggests, MARSOC should then conduct a form of mixed method research to ensure that they verify and reinforce initial survey responses.

If MARSOC can conduct these surveys in a manner that ensures validity, and follow-on interviews that are honest and reliable, it will be able to produce both quantifiable and qualitative data that they can then analyze. MARSOC can then compare these data injects against SOO entrance surveys and interviews to identify similarities or anomalies. Then, MARSOC can

compare its respondents against other SOF components and the Marine Corps officer population. In this manner, MARSOC will be able to determine if root problems exist, what it can potentially change, and ultimately stem its officer retention crisis.

APPENDIX A: MARSOC SOO SURVEY - SEPARATED

MARSOC SOO EXIT SURVEY

Last Name: First Name: M.I.: Reason for exit:

How did you receive your commission?

Were you ever enlisted? Current primary occupation

1. Why did you join the United States Marine Corps?
 Rank in order of precedence, if applicable - 1 = most influential, 7 = less influential (Use each number only once)

<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Education reimbursement	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Excitement/Adventure	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Family Legacy
<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Disinterest in civilian workforce	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Potential for Impact/Sense of Purpose	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Best job available/economy
<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Other (Fill in) <input type="text"/>		

2. Why did you join MARSOC?
 Rank in order of precedence, if applicable - 1 = most influential, 6 = less influential (Use each number only once)

<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Interest in SOF	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> SOF Culture/Camaraderie	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Desire for MOS Change
<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Mission Dissatisfaction with conventional USMC	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Additional Pay (Jump/Dive)	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Dissatisfaction with conventional USMC leadership
<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Other (Fill in) <input type="text"/>		

3. When you joined the USMC, did you plan to serve 20+ years until retirement?

4. When you joined MARSOC, did you plan to serve 20+ years until retirement?

5. How many deployments did you do with MARSOC?

6. How many deployments did you do with MARSOC to a combat zone?

7. Please rank order the top reasons you chose to leave MARSOC
 (Choose up to 5 items(minimum of 3) and rank in order of precedence: 1 = most influential, 5 = less influential)

<input type="text" value="N/A"/> MARSOC mission	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Op-Tempo too high	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Work-life balance	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Relationship with senior leaders
<input type="text" value="N/A"/> SOO's role in MARSOC mission	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Op-Tempo too low	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Family concerns (unrelated to the job)	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Relationship with peers
<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Post-Team Commander billets	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Unchallenged by the work	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Family concerns (related to the job)	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Relationship with enlisted subordinates
<input type="text" value="N/A"/> SOO Career Pipeline	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Lack of autonomy	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Changes with MARSOC no longer align with my beliefs	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Training Injuries
<input type="text" value="N/A"/> SOO Community Management	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Lack/Inadequate training	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Personal life changes not compatible with USMC lifestyle	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Combat Injuries
	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Over-worked		<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Mental Health
	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Over-stressed		

Other (Fill in):

8. How would you rate your overall job satisfaction in the conventional Marine Corps?

- Poor Below Average Average Above Average Exceptional

9. How would you rate your overall job satisfaction in MARSOC?

- Poor Below Average Average Above Average Exceptional

10. Knowing what you know now, do you regret your decision to leave the conventional Marine Corps?

11. Knowing what you know now, do you regret your decision to leave MARSOC?

12. Would you recommend the USMC as a whole to others as a career?

13. Would you recommend MARSOC to others as a career?

14. For Marines interested in SOF, would you recommend MARSOC over an inter-service transfer?

15. Would you have stayed in if MARSOC had given you...

(Choose up to 5 items (minimum of 3) and rank in order of precedence: 1 = most influential, 5 = less influential)

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|---|
| <input type="text" value="N/A"/> | <input type="text" value="Retention Bonuses"/> | <input type="text" value="N/A"/> | <input type="text" value="Sabbatical to pursue education goals"/> |
| <input type="text" value="N/A"/> | <input type="text" value="Better Missions"/> | <input type="text" value="N/A"/> | <input type="text" value="In-residence ILE/PME opportunities"/> |
| <input type="text" value="N/A"/> | <input type="text" value="Increased Operational Tours"/> | <input type="text" value="N/A"/> | <input type="text" value="Senior Mentor involvement from O5/O6 level"/> |
| <input type="text" value="N/A"/> | <input type="text" value="Less Bureaucracy"/> | <input type="text" value="N/A"/> | <input type="text" value="Other: (Free Text)"/> |
| <input type="text" value="N/A"/> | <input type="text" value="Assignment based on talent"/> | <input type="text"/> | |
| <input type="text" value="N/A"/> | <input type="text" value="Increased Family Support"/> | | |
| <input type="text" value="N/A"/> | <input type="text" value="Better PERSTEMPO"/> | | |
| <input type="text" value="N/A"/> | <input type="text" value="More predictable deployment schedule"/> | | |
| <input type="text" value="N/A"/> | <input type="text"/> | | |

16. To what degree did MARSOC meet the expectations you had during your recruitment prior to A&S?

17. Do you feel MARSOC made an effort to retain you?

18. Did you actively seek alternate employment prior to separation from the USMC? (Made and sent resumes, spoke to potential employers, went on interviews, etc)

If yes, did you have employment secured prior to separation?

19. Were you sought out for employment prior to separation from the USMC? (Headhunter, recruiter, friend, etc contacted you about an opportunity)

If yes, did you accept that opportunity prior to separation?

20. Marital Status:

21. Did your marital status change while you were assigned to MARSOC?

22. Age when you joined MARSOC:

23. Age upon departure from MARSOC:

24. Did your number of dependents change after you were assigned to MARSOC?

25. Number of Dependents at time of departure:

26. Would you be willing to do a follow-on phone call?

a. If yes, please provide your phone number:

APPENDIX B: MARSOC SOO SURVEY – ACTIVE DUTY (DRAFT)

MARSOC SOO SURVEY

RESET FORM

Last Name: First Name: M.I.:

How did you receive your commission?

Were you ever enlisted?

Current Rank:

Did you attend A&S?

Did you attend ITC?

1. Why did you join the United States Marine Corps?
Rank in order of precedence, if applicable: 1 = most influential, 7 = less influential (Use each number only once)

<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Education reimbursement	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Excitement/Adventure	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Family Legacy
<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Disinterest in civilian workforce	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Potential for Impact/ Sense of Purpose	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Best job available/ economy
<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Other (Fill in)	<input type="text"/>	

2. Why did you join MARSOC?
Rank in order of precedence, if applicable: 1 = most influential, 6 = less influential (Use each number only once)

<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Interest in SOF Mission	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> SOF Culture/Camaraderie
<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Dissatisfaction with conventional USMC	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Additional Pay (Jump/Dive)
<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Other (Fill in)	<input type="text" value="N/A"/> Desire for MOS Change
<input type="text"/>	

3. When you joined the USMC, did you plan to serve 20+ years until retirement?

4. When you joined MARSOC, did you plan to serve 20+ years until retirement?

6. How would you rate your overall quality of life in the conventional Marine Corps?

- Poor Below average Average Above average Exceptional

7. How would you rate your overall quality of life in MARSOC?

- Poor Below average Average Above average Exceptional

8. Would you recommend the USMC as a whole to others as a career?

SELECT ONE: ▾

9. Would you recommend MARSOC to others as a career?

SELECT ONE: ▾

10. For Marines interested in SOF, would you recommend MARSOC over an inter-service transfer?

SELECT ONE: ▾

11. What can MARSOC do to retain quality SOOs?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Retention Bonuses | <input type="checkbox"/> Assignment based on talent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Better Missions | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Explain Below:) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Operational Tours | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less Bureaucracy | |

12. Do you feel like MARSOC is making an effort to retain you?

SELECT ONE: ▾

Marital Status: Choose One: ▾

Current Age:

Number of Dependents:

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