

Why Recruiting Should be the Corps' Top Priority

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"Why Recruiting Should be the Corps' Top Priority"
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Until recently, the Marine Corps had consistently achieved its monthly contracting mission since July 1995. This record of success had been the longest in the entire Department of Defense.¹ The biggest reason for that success had "been the stellar efforts of all those Marines assigned to the recruiting force as well as the Corps willingness to commit the requisite resources".²

Unfortunately, the Marine Corps fell short of its recruiting goal for the first time in nearly a decade in January 2005.³ The Marine Corps recent failure to make its contracting mission can be attributed to a number of factors related to the global war on terrorism (GWOT). Since the beginning of the GWOT, Marine Corps Recruiting Command (MCRC) has suffered reductions in its operating budget and decreased manning levels. These two areas coupled with a growing economy and the war in Iraq have made it increasingly more challenging for the Marine Corps to make its recruiting mission.

Unless MCRC receives an immediate increase in its manning levels and operating budget, the Marine Corps may

¹ Marc Ayalin, "Marine Corps Recruiting Command Hits Centennial Mark." *Leatherneck*, Vol. 86, Iss. 12, December 2003, 34.

² Commandant of the Marine Corps. MarAdmin 395/04: Voluntary Extensions for Marines on Recruiting Duty, 14 Sep 2004, 1.

³ Robert Burns, *Marines Fall Short of Recruiting Goal*. 3 February 2005. <http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&cid=542&e=7&u=/ap/marine_corps_recruiting> (6 February 2005), 1.

fall short of its full-year goal for the first time since 1995. Failure to meet the accession mission would have a severe impact on force readiness levels. The Marine Corps needs to increase MCRC's manning levels and operating budget in order to meet the demands of the GWOT and future contingencies.

Demands of the GWOT and Future Contingencies

The GWOT has been very manpower intensive and has placed extreme strain on much of the operating forces. Because of this, meeting the accession mission is more critical now than it has been for decades.

Maintaining a constant flow of newly trained Marines is critical for sustaining the Table of Organization (T/O) requirements of those units presently being deployed. While the casualties from the GWOT remain far less than those suffered during previous wars, additional personnel are still needed to replace those Marines who have been killed or wounded in action.

In addition to the deployments that are currently taking place, the Marine Corps needs to be prepared for future contingencies. The GWOT is likely to extend far beyond Iraq and Afghanistan. If such is the case, then the Marine Corps may be faced with fighting wars in two separate countries or theatres.

Furthermore, it is highly probable that the Marine Corps will participate in future peacekeeping roles after the fighting ceases. These types of operations are very manpower intensive and can last for an indefinite period of time.

Past, Current and Future Missions

In order to sustain the operating forces, the Marine Corps must meet its yearly accession goal as assigned by Manpower and Reserve Affairs. MCRC's mission is to find and enlist "qualified men and women who are up to the challenge of becoming Marines."⁴ MCRC continues its search for potential applicants in a demanding and highly competitive recruiting environment.

For MCRC, "accomplishing this mission requires the integration of complex systems for recruiting and training recruiters, for allocating fiscal and personnel resources, and for targeting recruiter efforts and activities in direction that are most likely to achieve quantity and quality goals for the Marine Corps."⁵

The Marine Corps' authorized end strength was 175,000 active duty Marines for FY 2004. The National Defense

⁴ Jimmie W. Perkins, "Recruiting Duty: Are You Up to the Challenge?" *Marine Corps Gazette*, Vol. 88, Iss. 1, January 2004, 56.

⁵ Jeanette Cleveland, Kevin Murphy, and William T. Ross, Jr. "Evaluate the Marine Corps' Recruiting Effort: Executive Summary." Marine Corps Research University & Penn State University, 30 May 2003, 2.

Authorization Act allowed the Marine Corps to go to 178,000 for FY 2005 and eventually to 184,000 if desired. Because the Marine Corps was not given extra funding for the increases, the Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC) decided not to exceed 178,000. If the Marine Corps had chosen to go beyond this number, it would have been at the expense of other programs.⁶ This new mission poses yet another challenge for an already strained recruiting force.

Another issue affecting the recruiting mission is retention. The Marine Corps has done exceptionally well in meeting its retention/reenlistment goals for the past several years; however, the current deployment cycle caused by the GWOT might cause a significant drop in these areas.⁷ Retention directly affects accession missions because "Marines who fill boatspaces relate directly to how many new Marines we have to bring into the Marine Corps".⁸ Hence, decreased retention rates means an increase in the Marine Corps accession mission, resulting in yet another dilemma for MCRC.

Although the Marine Corps missed its monthly contracting mission in January 2005, it is still on track

⁶ Mark A. Ramirez, Major USMC, Action Officer, Marine Corps Recruiting Command. "Info." 23 November 2004. Personal email (23 November 2004), 2.

⁷ Ramirez, 3.

⁸ Ramirez, 3.

to meet its annual goals.⁹ However, the toughest recruiting months of February-May will play a critical role in determining the success or failure of MCRC during FY 2005.

Year	Net New Contracts	Accessions	8412(T/O)	8411(T/O)	8412 (act)	8411 (act)	Actual Net APR
1996	42018	39465					
1997	39792	40369	551	2081	444	2485	1.33
1998	35027	40325	551	2079	444	2420	1.21
1999	36938	39414	551	2140	444	2455	1.25
2000	39412	39393	551	2141	444	2595	1.27
2001	38659	38718	551	2332	444	2796	1.15
2002	39486	38666	551	2463	444	2760	1.19
2003	37684	38685	551	2463	444	2822	1.11
2004*	34561	36773	551	2463	444	2614	1.10
2005	38329	39150	551	2463	444	2614	1.22

Note: 8412 is a career recruiter

8411 is a B-billet recruiter

APR = Average Per Recruiter (Monthly)

* Decreased mission in 2004 was due to stop loss imposed during 2003

Source: Marine Corps Recruiting Command

MCRC's Manning Levels

During a review of manning levels amongst various commands, it was determined that MCRC was not in compliance with the Commandant's guidance for manning levels. The CMC's guidance is that no command will be manned above 100%. "MCRC has been historically overstaffed up to 117% since 1995".¹⁰ MCRC's "Table of Organization (T/O) and

⁹ Burns, 2.

¹⁰ C. E. Catencamp, LtCol USMC, MCRC G-3. *Information Paper: MCRC T/O Increase*, 20 Aug 2004, 1.

manning levels had been a luxury that was fought for and won during the General Krulak regime."¹¹

To account for recruiters "not on production" for various reasons (i.e. reliefs, checking in/checking out, non-production billets, annual leave, etc.), MCRC was staffed at 105-110%.¹² "With a reduction of qualified youth due to the Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) renorming 1 July 04, a potentially improving economy and an unknown effect of the current war on propensity of American youth to serve, any reduction in the current overstaff could risk the ability of MCRC to meet its accession mission."¹³

The understanding that MCRC would be overstaffed was not questioned until last year. Because of the GWOT, the operating forces have been given manning priorities over the past several years. This has caused the size of the recruiting force to decline.¹⁴ "The small class sizes at recruiter's school in FY 2003 and FY 2004 have not kept pace with the number of Marines leaving recruiting duty."¹⁵

Class sizes have only recently begun to increase;

¹¹ Michael Styka, Head Enlisted Recruiting, Marine Corps Recruiting Command. "Info." 23 November 2004. Personal email (23 November 2004), 2.

¹² Styka, 2.

¹³ Catencamp, C. E., LtCol USMC, MCRC G-3. *Information Paper: Marine Corps Recruiting Command Overstaff*, 28 May 2004, 2.

¹⁴ CMC, 1.

¹⁵ CMC, 1.

however, many of the new graduates from recruiter's school "will not begin to recruit until March 2005 at the earliest."¹⁶ Because of this, MCRC implemented a voluntary extension policy in September 2004 "to help alleviate the current shortage of recruiters."¹⁷

The current 105% overstaff assists in maintaining 100% production recruiters, but does not completely cover the shortages. MCRC is currently short a large number of Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) Liaison billets on the T/O.¹⁸ Additionally, there is a shortage of extended active duty (EAD) recruiters due to the current mobilization of many reserve units. "These billets are included as production recruiters and assist in relieving the burden on the active forces."¹⁹

"Although MCRC has received increases to the T/O, they were not sufficient enough to cover all shortfalls and overstaffs have continued. MCRC was asked to validate their T/O in order to alleviate the need for an overstaff. It was agreed that MCRC should produce a T/O that

¹⁶ CMC, 1.

¹⁷ CMC, 1.

¹⁸ C. E. Catencamp, LtCol USMC, MCRC G-3. *Information Paper: MCRC T/O Increase*, 20 Aug 2004, 1.

¹⁹ Catencamp, 2.

eliminates overstaffs, yet is designed to meet 40,000 total force accessions per year".²⁰

The new Table of Organization Change Request (TOCR) that is being proposed will increase MCRC's current T/O by approximately 425 recruiters. The new T/O is necessary to "maintain the necessary amount of production recruiters and alleviate any need for overstaffs or additional T/O increases."²¹ This new number will put MCRC's real number of recruiters at approximately 3200.²² "This will allow MCRC to be manned at 100% during average external conditions given an average accessions mission."²³

The only problem with all of this is that it will still take time for these changes to take effect. MCRC is coming up on its toughest recruiting months of the year and will be below the T/O for production recruiters. Moreover, new recruiters that are received by the recruiting stations (RS's) will require further training before they are actually "on-production." Therefore, the recruiters that are currently "on the street" will have to work especially hard to achieve mission success.

²⁰ Catencamp, 1.

²¹ Catencamp, 2.

²² Styka, 2.

²³ Catencamp, 2.

MCRC's Operating Budget

The GWOT has greatly affected MCRC's operating budget as well. Since the start of the GWOT, MCRC has experienced budget reductions that have severely hampered the recruiting effort.

The first reduction MCRC endured was caused by Headquarters Marine Corps trying to get programming and the budget aligned. The second reduction came from the Department of the Navy and by lack of inflation increases. Finally, funding the GWOT has forced MCRC to shift funds away from desperately needed programs to pay for other necessary expenses.²⁴

MCRC's budget is broken down into two large areas - recruiting support and advertising support. Recruiting support are bills that have to be paid such as cell phones, vehicles, facilities, etc. for which there is little to no flexibility. The second area, advertising support, helps to generate leads for recruiters through effective marketing done with the assistance of the J. Walter Thompson marketing corporation. Under this area falls paid media, which is the area that has been most affected.²⁵

²⁴ Corey Bonnell, LtCol USMC, AC/S Comptroller, Marine Corps Recruiting Command. Interview by Author, 3 January 2005, 2.

²⁵ Bonnell, 1.

"MCRC executes a highly targeted marketing campaign that seeks to educate and inform select individuals about the opportunities and benefits of serving in the Corps."²⁶ Since its inception, MCRC's marketing campaign has played a critical role in helping to achieve mission success.

The "millennial" generation that MCRC is trying to recruit "has a much different outlook on life than "Generation X" - one that is more favorable to Marine recruiting."²⁷ Unfortunately the "millennial" generation relies heavily upon the family when making decisions. With the current GWOT and the war in Iraq in particular, many recruiters are having a tougher time easing the parents' concerns. It has become increasingly more difficult when recruiters attempt to sign up applicants who require parental consent. Oftentimes, "recruiters are finding they must make more visits with the parents to get them on board."²⁸ According to a spokesperson at MCRC, many parents are "making their sons and daughters wait until they are eighteen"²⁹ before they can enlist.

²⁶ David M. Griesmer, "Recruiting Success Assisted by Effective Marketing." *Marine Corps Gazette*, Vol. 87, Iss. 6, June 2003, 30.

²⁷ Griesmer, 30.

²⁸ Gordon Lubold, "New Recruiting Challenge: Bigger Goal Comes as War Dissuades Some From Enlisting." *Marine Corps Times*, 4 October 2004, 8.

²⁹ Burns, 2.

Another challenge for recruiters is "the more stable economic outlook."³⁰ As the economy continues to improve, many young Americans see the military as less of an option. MCRC's marketing program helps to display both the tangible and intangible benefits of joining the Corps. This helps to attract some young people who would otherwise enter the civilian job market.

Due to budget cuts caused by the GWOT, money from paid media has been pulled to help fund recruiting support operations. The only way for MCRC to receive additional funds for the current year is to ask for a midyear review or to get a supplemental request from congress.³¹ Both of these methods can be difficult to get approved and may be too late to have the desired effect.

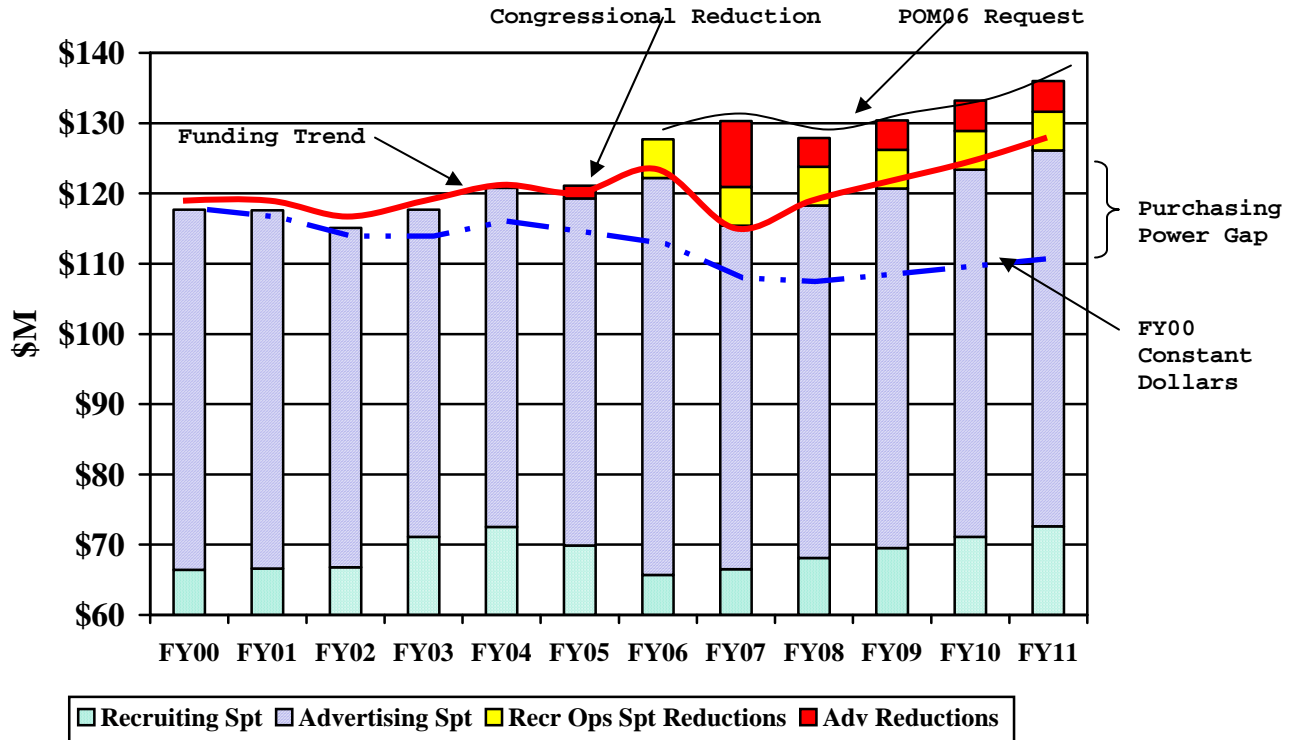
As the chart below illustrates, MCRC is not scheduled to receive the necessary funding as per its requests. FY 2005 has a lower budget than FY 2004 even though the accession mission is higher. Furthermore, the budget for the next six years does not keep up with inflation costs. At the present time, paid media has an inflation rate of approximately 6 1/2 to 7% per year for which MCRC is only

³⁰ Lubold, 8.

³¹ Bonnell, 2.

receiving a budget increase of 2% or less each year.³²

The result will be less advertising and decreased awareness amongst the Marine Corps' target market. Unless corrected, this will mean fewer leads for Marine recruiters.



Notes: FY04 and prior - Actual funding
 FY05 - Official Budget figures
 FY06-11 - Program Objective Management (POM) figures

Source: AC/S Comptroller, MCRC

The Marine Corps needs to provide MCRC with annual budget increases that are equal to or greater than inflation rates. MCRC relies heavily on the leads generated through its marketing campaign to help reach its contracting and accession missions. Moreover, the Marine

³² Bonnell, 1.

Corps needs to increase funding for paid media to help counter the sometimes grisly and/or negative images stemming from the GWOT. If properly funded, MCRC's marketing program will provide more leads from qualified applicants as well as increasing the confidence amongst the parents of potential applicants.

Counterargument

Some people may think that no problems exist since the Marine Corps is still on track for making its accession mission; however, the contracting mission is what makes this possible. When the Marine Corps misses its contracting mission, the number of applicants in the delayed entry program (DEP) dwindles. This in turn, makes it much more difficult to make the accession mission.

The recruit depots can only train a limited number of recruits at any given time because of "bed space" issues and company training cycles. If the Marine Corps falls behind on its accession mission, it cannot make up for it all at once because of the aforementioned constraints. Therefore, consistency is critical in making the FY goal.

Another argument is that MCRC's manning levels will soon be on the rise due to recent policies being emplaced. Unfortunately, problems with manning levels in the near future cannot be resolved, thereby leaving MCRC with a

shortage of production recruiters during the toughest recruiting months of the year.

The Marine Corps has always prided itself on being able to do more with less. While this may sometimes be true, such is not the case with recruiting. Recruiting is a very demanding job that will always require an extraordinary amount of time, energy, and effort to achieve success. Faced with the current world situation, recruiters need to be given every tool available to help make them successful.

The most valid argument is that funding and manning are needed elsewhere. While the operating forces should receive urgent priority for funding and manning, MCRC should be the top priority since it is what sustains the Marine Corps.

Conclusion

The GWOT has made recruiting ever more difficult for both MCRC and the average Marine recruiter. If the Marine Corps is to achieve its accession mission for FY 2005, it needs to immediately increase the size of its recruiting force as well as provide MCRC with a current year budget increase. Whether this means involuntary extensions for B-billet recruiters or cutting other programs to allow for additional funding, something has to be done immediately.

The Marine Corps must possess sufficient strength to be able to accomplish its assigned missions and fulfill its obligations. If the Marine Corps fails to reach its accession mission, voids will be created throughout the operating forces. The result will be decreased force readiness levels that may limit the Marine Corps' ability to support the GWOT and any future contingencies.

General Krulak once stated that the Marine Corps has two missions, "Making Marines and Winning Battles." The first of these two missions must be achieved for the latter to be executed. Recruiting is the lifeblood of the Corps and must never be shortchanged for without it, the Marine Corps would cease to exist.

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