

# 0430 Mobility Officers in the Reserve Component

## The impact of shortfalls

by LtCol Christopher L. Junkins

### **T**he Challenge of Mobilization Readiness

As military operations continue to evolve, the effectiveness of the Marine Corps reserve component has become increasingly vital to national security. However, a significant obstacle has arisen: Selected Marine Corps Reserve (SMCR) Mobility officers face profound limitations in performing their essential duties due to the constraints of their reserve status. This shortfall impacts their ability to effectively prepare units for mobilization, as it takes years of experience to become proficient as a restricted officer. Unfortunately, the limited number of training days available each fiscal year for reserve Marines does not support attaining that necessary experience, meaning many mobility officers are unable to reach the level of functionality

**>LtCol Junkins is a Mobility and Limited Duty Officer. He serves as the Marine Forces Reserve Strategic Mobility Officer.**

Readiness Assessment and Assistance Program reveal that several Marine Forces Reserve (MARFORRES) units are not able to activate without outside assistance, highlighting an urgent need for reform within the structural framework of mobility officers in the reserve component.

### **Selected Marine Corps Reserve versus Active Reserve in the Mobility Community**

The SMCR and Active Reserve (AR) Marines serve distinct roles within the Marine Corps reserve com-

status with limited drills and annual training prevents SMCR mobility officers from achieving and maintaining the same level of operational engagement that an AR mobility officer would receive. The SMCR Marines typically train one weekend per month and two weeks per year, making it challenging to stay fully integrated into the constantly evolving force deployment process. In contrast, active-duty (AD) Marines have 365 days to refine their abilities and gain crucial experience. The sporadic nature of a SMCR mobility officer's training hinders their ability to cultivate the institutional knowledge, realtime operational awareness, and interagency coordination essential for effective embarkation planning and execution, as these skills are perishable and require consistent practice to maintain proficiency. As such, mobility officers in the SMCR simply cannot achieve or maintain the requisite qualifications needed to move their unit as a whole. Our SMCR mobility officers often find themselves preoccupied with their activation, which further detracts from their capacity to concentrate on mobilizing the unit collectively.

Conversely, AR Marines serve full-time, ensuring they remain actively engaged in Joint Event Life Cycle planning. Their continuous involvement allows them to build and maintain relationships with higher and supporting agencies through habitual coordination, executing joint exercises and real-world deployments. This full-time commitment enables AR Marines to stay current with evolving transportation policies and integrate seamlessly

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required for their roles. Their part-time engagement restricts consistent participation in crucial training and planning activities, ultimately jeopardizing the execution of embarkation operations throughout the deployment process. As the operational demands on the Marine Corps Reserve escalate, it is imperative that we confront these challenges head-on. Recent findings from the Force

ponent, particularly in embarkation and mobility. While both contribute to force readiness, SMCR Marines face inherent limitations due to their restricted number of annual training days. Proficiency as a mobility officer demands years of experience and exposure to achieve highly skilled and capable mobility officers in the Marine Corps. Selected Marine Corps Reserve

into force deployment cycles, successfully addressing the gaps highlighted by the SMCR mobility officers. Ultimately, while SMCR Marines play a valuable supporting role in Marine Corps embarkation and logistics, managing the full spectrum of force deployment responsibilities—from planning through execution and redeployment—requires the full-time commitment and expertise provided by AR mobility officers.

### Overcoming Structural Challenges: Enhancing Reserve Mobility Capabilities

Outside of MARFORRES, the II MEF stands as the only other Service-retained force within the Marine Corps. Structurally, MARFORRES closely resembles II MEF, with the primary difference being the absence of MEUs and a MEF headquarters. Both organizations operate on a similar scale, with MARFORRES overseeing twelve major subordinate commands/elements, while II MEF manages thirteen at the regimental or group level and higher. II MEF boasts 4 locations staffed with 25 mobility officers dedicated to managing the Force Deployment Planning and Execution process. In stark contrast, MARFORRES, despite its extensive network of more than 150 home training centers across the continental United States, relies on a mere two active component mobility officers to handle this same critical process.

Moreover, the reserve component is constrained by 13 SMCR mobility officer billets, each limited to 48 drill periods and as few as 12 days of annual training. This limitation significantly undermines their effectiveness in meeting operational requirements. The competing demands of civilian careers and military obligations further prevent SMCR mobility officers from fully engaging in essential activities such as exercise life cycles, training, inspections, embarkation, and port operations. This misalignment not only reduces mobilization readiness but also diminishes the operational effectiveness of SMCR mobility officers, ultimately crippling MARFORRES' capacity to support activations and exercises efficiently.



**Marines and airmen load a UH-1Y Venom helicopter onto a C-5 Super Galaxy aircraft during a static load exercise at Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base New Orleans, Belle Chasse, LA. Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron (HMLA) 773, 4th Marine Aircraft Wing, Marine Forces Reserve, trained alongside 26th Aerial Port Squadron, 68th Airlift Squadron, to mentor and develop the next generation of logisticians, while fostering cross-Service knowledge and collaboration between Air Force and Marine Corps teams. (Photo by Sgt Emely Gonzalez.)**

As the operational pressures on the reserve component intensify—whether through Global Force Management events, *Force Design* initiatives, or crisis responses—the existing mobility structure will struggle to provide the necessary support. MARFORRES' heavy reliance on just two AC mobility officers and a limited number of AR mobility chiefs within the major subordinate commands/elements to facilitate exercise, activation and mobilization support results in a constrained capability posing significant challenges in delivering simultaneous embarkation support throughout the force, detracting from unit training and the development of crucial Reserve Mobility Training Plans. Transitioning mobility officer billets from SMCR to AR is essential for enhancing force readiness and ensuring Reserve units can integrate seamlessly into large-scale operations.

### Transitioning Mobility Officer SMCR Billets to the AR

The Marine Corps' ability to deploy forces rapidly and effectively depends on the expertise and continuous engagement of highly trained mobility officers. As demonstrated throughout this article, the complexity of modern force deployment requires full-time professionals who can participate in every phase of planning, execution, and redeployment. While SMCR Marines provide valuable support, their limited annual training days prevent them from maintaining realtime operational awareness, institutional knowledge, and interagency coordination necessary for seamless embarkation operations. Converting all SMCR mobility officer billets to the AR is essential to ensure the Marine Corps reserve component fully integrates into the broader force deployment structure.

How does an SMCR CWO4 mobility officer compare to an AD CWO4? There is a significant difference in capability between the two, yet both are expected to operate at the same level. Without converting these billets to AR positions, we risk having a senior SMCR mobility officer, despite holding the same title, likely possessing no more experience than a junior mobility officer on the AD side due to the limited training days available. Active Reserve Marines can engage continuously in joint planning cycles, establish enduring relationships with key mobility stakeholders, and remain current on evolving transportation policies, certifications, and strategic mobility initiatives. Additionally, having an AR mobility officer in place provides a critical advantage in unit mobilization embarkation activities, ensuring reserve units can efficiently transition from peacetime readiness to operational deployment without unnecessary delays or logistical shortfalls. Their full-time presence allows them to oversee embarkation training, validate unit deployment plans, and coordinate transportation assets effectively, ensuring a smoother and more rapid mobilization process.

Mobility officers are also essential to the Joint Event Life Cycle Process, which aligns Marine Corps

deployments with joint exercises and operational planning. Their involvement ensures Marine units meet transportation requirements, facilitating seamless coordination with other Services. In the Joint Planning Process, mobility officers are key action officers and participants who contribute to mission analysis, course of action development, and transportation planning, preventing logistical bottlenecks and enhancing mission success. Working closely with combatant commands, U.S. Transportation Command, and Joint Task Forces, mobility officers refine embarkation strategies and validate deployment data, integrating Marine Corps mobility needs into the broader operational framework. However, the current limitations of SMCR mobility officer billets hinder their ability to maintain continuous engagement in these critical roles.

By making this transition, the Marine Corps will enhance its overall readiness, improve coordination in Joint and multinational environments, and ensure that every mobility officer—active or reserve—can execute the mission effectively. Investing in a fully AR-staffed mobility officer community will provide the Marine Corps Reserve with a stronger, more responsive, and more effective strategic mobility capability.

### **Ensuring Future Readiness Through Strategic Mobility**

The ability of the Marine Corps Reserve to remain a relevant, ready, and responsive force hinges on its capacity to execute force deployment planning and embarkation operations with precision. As the demand for global exercises, crisis response, and the potential for large-scale mobilization increases, the current limitations of SMCR mobility officer billets hinder the RC's ability



**Marines and airmen secure a UH-1Y Venom helicopter onto a C-5 Super Galaxy during a static load exercise at Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base New Orleans, Belle Chasse, LA. (Photo by Sgt Emely Gonzalez.)**

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to integrate seamlessly with the active force. Transitioning these billets to AR status is not merely a structural change of convenience; it is a necessity to ensure mobility readiness, enhance joint force coordination, and provide sustained expertise in the Force Deployment Planning and Execution process. Investing in a fully AR-staffed mobility officer community will empower the Marine Corps to enhance its overall readiness and operational capacity.

As operational requirements continue to evolve, the Marine Corps must take decisive action to strengthen its strategic mobility capability in the re-

serve force. This transition will not only address immediate challenges but also lay the groundwork for a more agile, responsive, and effective force capable of meeting future demands. By ensuring all mobility officers—active or reserve—can execute their mission effectively, the Marine Corps will enhance its ability to support national defense objectives, solidifying its role as a vital component of national readiness.

*>Author's Note: CWO4 Robert I. Johnson, USMCR 0430, contributed to this article.*

