

Marine Corps Reserve: The Choice for Non-Standard Missions

Time to make it official doctrine

by Maj Brad Miller

Over the past decade, the Marine Corps has successfully mobilized for non-standard missions. As the Corps looks to restructure under *Force Design 2030*, it is time to consider the reserve component (RC) as the best option for these missions. This will have numerous benefits, one of which includes relieving the strain on the active component. The civilian skill sets of the RC also make it better suited to handle these types of missions. For instance, the RC has both military and civilian experiences and

>Maj Miller is a Staff Judge Advocate with the 4th MarDiv, New Orleans, LA. In his civilian capacity, Maj Miller practices law as a criminal defense attorney in Phoenix, AZ, where he has been awarded the Justice Achievement Award for his work in Maricopa County and has been recognized by the Arizona State Bar with a Top Defense Verdict.

skills that often do not exist amongst the active component. In combat operations, a fire team leader must follow specific SOPs to execute the mission. In a humanitarian assistance mission, that same fire team leader may need to

possess non-military skills to execute the mission. This type of civilian experience has been recognized throughout military history as a *necessity* in times of crisis.

The Romans had a position (*magister populi*) to handle a specific crisis for a six-month period. Upon completion of the mission, the position automatically dissolved, and the individual went home. In 458 BC, the Aequi people built a wall around the Roman army, pinning them on Mount Algidus. Lucius Minucius, the Roman General, had no doctrine to get out of this situation, so the Romans sent a delegation to call on Cincinnatus, a former consul, to use his personal experience and military knowledge to rescue the army: “The former consul was unanimously chosen because in him were the courage and resolution equal to the majestic authority of that office.”¹ Within fifteen days, Cincinnatus victoriously returned home to his plow. His creativity and maturity proved to be the reason for the swift and decisive victory; it is no different with the RC today.²



Mobilized reservists were crucial to Operation ALLIES WELCOME. (Photo by LCpl David Intriago.)

In little more than 14 days, nearly 889 Reserve Marines from 13 different states mobilized to Virginia to support Operation ALLIES WELCOME (OAW). These Marines left civilian occupations, including technology companies, state and federal law enforcement agencies, accounting firms, law firms, retail, logistics, and some left college mid-semester. The importance of the RC's civilian skills in executing OAW was critical.

A reserve lance corporal, a member of Fox Company 2/24, used his civilian skills as an electrician's apprentice to solve a heater issue that had been plaguing the entry control points throughout the task force. The entry control points were staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and often in the middle of the night when the temperatures dropped into the high teens. So, the Marine Corps ran space heaters but they kept tripping the breakers, causing power outages throughout the entire area. The lance corporal used his knowledge as an electrician to investigate the loads and came up with a solution to install space heaters that could be acquired for free at Servmart that no longer tripped the breakers.

A corporal from Wisconsin—who works as a police officer and entry-level firefighter, certified in emergency medical response—volunteered as a certified medical professional to oversee Fox Company's training and operations because of the lack of corpsman and medical support. Additionally, a sergeant who works as an emergency room nurse provided his medical expertise in various ways throughout the formation. These are just a few of the military-related examples of why the RC was the best option for executing OAW. Finishing the job, however, required more than military-related skills.

Over ten thousand Afghan refugees were resettled through Fort Pickett: men, women, and children. The task force provided food, shelter, formula, diapers, clothes, hygiene items, and all other basic needs to the Afghans. To provide these items, they had to be received, stored, sorted, tracked, and distributed in an efficient manner. A couple of Marines were put in charge of these operations, and a staff sergeant—

who is a load puller and logistics coordinator at Lowe's—was instrumental in organizing the thousands of items for distribution. A corporal—who is a mortarman by MOS and works as a retail store manager—was put in charge of receiving, sorting, inventory, and distributing the thousands of donated items to the Afghan children. To keep track of

database that automatically produced reports to their company and battalion commanders three times per week. The reports were so helpful that they were integrated into the joint task force decision cycle. The company and battalion commanders appreciated a better understanding of the skill sets of their Marines to ensure each was tasked ap-

In little more than 14 days, nearly 889 Reserve Marines from 13 different states mobilized to Virginia to support Operation ALLIES WELCOME (OAW).

all these items, another corporal, also a mortarman by trade, used his degree in statistics to create a clothing database to track when all Afghans received a full set of clothing. The RC Marines did not wait to be told what needed to be accomplished. Many showed initiative by seeking out gaps in the operation.

Two lance corporals noticed that when the Afghan refugees arrived, there was no accountability system, so an armorer and a supply clerk created a census system. One of the lance corporals used his degree in physics and the other applied his education as an electrical engineer to create a census

appropriately. The analytics used by the OAW commanders could be created by RC Marines for Marine Corps-wide usage. Furthermore, the talent to perform these tasks already exists in the RC as evidenced by OAW.

Analytics has influenced business, human resources, sports, and soon will influence how the Marine Corps recruits and uses the talent pool. The CMC recognizes this in his *Talent Management 2030* document when he writes, "Our current system of personnel management ... was designed in the industrial era and predates a host of cultural and technological developments



Reserve Marines drew on their civilian job skills to assist with all aspects of supporting and integrating Afghan evacuees. (Photo by Chief Petty Officer John Pearl.)



The varied skill sets of reserve Marines require a comprehensive system to identify and manage required talent. (Photo by Cpl James Stanfield.)

that characterize today's world."³ This problem was even more apparent for OAW because the COs had no system capable of matching the skill sets of the mobilizing Marines to the operational requirements.

that could be downloaded and sorted through a simple application that a few RC Marines could write during a long annual training weekend. The information provided through this one platform includes all job experience, education,

Marines join the reserves for a host of reasons, but they stay because they find purpose in the work. Non-standard missions give Marines purpose in their work.

Implementing a system to understand the talent pool would be difficult at first, but the Marine Corps needs to start identifying factors of high performers. These factors will translate a Marine's abilities, experience, and soft skills into billets and teams. For a CO, it would be akin to a fantasy football draft tool. The system could even be used to advertise for skill sets with the ultimate goal of fielding the best team for the mission. There are numerous off-the-shelf solutions that the Marine Corps could use to handle all human resource and talent management needs like Monday, Freshworks, ADP, or Gusto. Before going to an all-in-one solution, the Marine Corps could harness already available data from their Marines' social media with websites like LinkedIn. Every RC Marine has a LinkedIn profile

volunteer activities, skills, awards, interests, and organizations. This information is infinitely better than the data currently received by a CO. RC Marines currently have the capability to match skill sets with positions—a capability that would also increase retention.

Marines join the reserves for a host of reasons, but they stay because they find purpose in the work. Non-standard missions give Marines purpose in their work. These missions make Marines proud to discuss their service. Viktor Frankl once stated, "Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose." Missions like OAW break up the monotony of Marinenet classes, PFTs, and annual training courses that plague most reserve unit weekends. Giving these Marines a purpose to train increases their

efficiency; in the words of Simon Sinek, giving the Marines their "Why." Of course, OAW was not *just* about serving the Afghans, the Marines completed annual training events including land navigation, back-in-the-saddle training, defenses in-depth, the indoor simulated marksmanship trainer, and the art of mobilizing.

Many think of the RC as *only* a "break-glass force," but it has shown once again that it can successfully handle non-standard missions—missions not likely to go away. The lessons learned from OAW also show that the RC has the capabilities to handle refugee missions overseas. This is the reason why the RC should be considered the best option for these missions in *Force Design 2030*. In one of the most memorable scenes from the movie *Saving Private Ryan*, CAPT John H. Miller's soldiers finally discover the secret to his maturity and flexibility. "Mike? What's the pool on me up to right now? What's it up to? What is it three hundred dollars—is that it? Three hundred? I'm a school teacher. I teach English Composition in this little town called Addley, Pennsylvania." CAPT Miller's civilian occupation gave him the skills to handle the extremely difficult task of leading his soldiers. This same resolve, maturity, and knowledge exist in the RC—now it is on the Marine Corps to use it.

Notes

1. Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, (New York, NY: Penguin, 2002).
2. The Aequi built a wall around the Roman Army, so Cincinnatus built a wall around the Aequi. The wall forced the Aequi to fight a two-front war, which quickly ended in their defeat. See Livy, *How Cincinnatus Saved a Roman Army* (c. Early 1st Century C.E.), Salem Community College, (n.d.), available at <https://salemcc.instructure.com>.
3. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Talent Management 2030*, (Washington, DC: November 2021).

