

The Reserve Cyber Force

Upgrading a unique force multiplier

by LtCol Ben Leming, USMCR

As the Marine Corps looks to build capacity in increasingly uncertain times, it is practical to recognize the limitations of our weaponry; indeed, the recently released *Force Design 2030* document reflects this reality. As once beloved core capabilities, such as tanks and artillery, have found themselves relegated to the annals of history, it is the perennial and unique advantage that the Marine Corps possesses that will chart the course of the future: its people. Although only briefly mentioned within the document, the reserves and the cyber domain are an area of increasing focus of future capabilities and force multipliers. In response to both the emerging threats outlined in the *Force Design 2030* as well as economic realities, it is important to maximize the effectiveness of the Marine Reserve Cyber Workforce and its significant capabilities.

Cyber reservists hail from varied Marine Corps backgrounds. While intelligence and communication are common primary MOSs, cyber reservists are avionic techs, logisticians, and artillery Marines—among others. This broad base of understanding of the Marine Corps lends itself to be of particular service in support of any Marine unit. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, cyber reservists are often professionals in the civilian IT sector (think behemoths like Google, Microsoft, or the banking industry). As such, their skill sets and understanding of burgeoning cyber related issues and problems must be leveraged and positioned at the pointy end of the spear. The misguided notion that reservists

>LtCol Leming is currently assigned to MARFORRES G9 in charge of reserve cyber force development. In his civilian capacity, he is a consultant at USCYBERCOM J5. For the past ten years, as both a military member and civilian, he held various positions in MARFORCYBER G2 and G3 as well as USCYBERCOM J5 and J7.



Cyber Reservists come from varied Marine Corps backgrounds and MOSs. (Photo by SSgt Jacob Osborne.)

are behind the power curve or need training to catch up with their active duty counterparts absolutely does not apply in cyberspace.

In the profession of cyber, people are the most valuable commodity. As MajGen Glavy, Commander of Marine Corps Forces Cyber Command, is known to say, “people, ideas, things ... in that order.” In the relatively small population of reserve cyber Marines, there is a wealth of knowledge, experience, and highly valuable skillsets that

do not exist anywhere else in the Marine Corps. These Marines possess skills not taught at any of the training schools, are developing software used in nearly every system around the globe, and in many cases are truly on the front lines of cyber engagement with malicious actors intent on attacking critical infrastructure and average Americans. Through a call to service, these Marines choose to take time away from their successful civilian careers to contribute to our national cyber defense.



Talent management will be crucial to building and maintaining the Reserve Cyber Force.
(Photo by SSgt Jacob Osborne.)

Talent management, retention, and recruitment are the keys to maintaining this unique capability and continuing to build a robust reserve cyber workforce. There are three important aspects to consider when deciding how best to capitalize on the talent of the cyber reservist. The first is the redesignation or lateral move of reserve cyber Marines to the cyberspace operations field, which is the 17xx MOS. The second is to provide for 1700 career progression for retention and service beyond major for officers and master sergeant for enlisted within the Reserve Component. The third and perhaps most important aspect to consider is the creation of a reserve cyber battalion.

The first and most important action to ensure the retention and best utilization of the reserve cyber Marine is to provide them a pathway to a lateral move into the 1700 MOS. This is critical because Marines (any Marine, active or reserve) cannot serve in a cyber billet and maintain proficiency for promotion in their current MOS. For example, a 06xx Marine that is serving in a cyber role would actually be negatively impacted for promotion when compared to their 06xx peer group. The obvious solution is to make it possible for reservists to make a lateral transfer into the 1700 MOS. While for the active com-

ponent this can be achieved through several months to over a year of 17xx MOS training, this is simply not feasible for the reservists who do not have the bandwidth to mobilize for this amount of training and maintain their civilian employment. Exploring the possibilities of allowing civilian education, certifications, and experience to augment and at times replace the military requirements for the MOS would provide two clear benefits: opportunities for reserve Marines to serve and promote, as well as retention of world-class cyber experts in a time where global instability calls for a robust cyber capability.

Lateral moves alone will not solve the obvious problems of career retention and progression. Without more reserve structure and billets for higher ranks, Marines will begin to face barriers to promotion. It is important to note that this will not just affect current Marine reservists pursuing a 17xx MOS. This is actually an issue that has been identified for Marines leaving active duty that already have a 17xx MOS. They, too, will face challenges as they determine whether or not to serve beyond their obligated time. Providing Marines with clear career progression and units that will utilize their skill sets is an important aspect of retention. The current structure for reserve cyber is

anemic at best—with only about 200 total billets in 2 Select Marine Corps Reserve (SMCR) Defensive Cyber Operations-Internal Defense Measures (DCO-IDM) Companies and the Marine Corps Forces Cyber Command Individual Mobilization Augmentee IMA Detachment; there is neither the ability to capture and retain talent nor the capability to apply it. More structure and creation of units that apply the various cyber skill sets must be created in order to allow for career progression and talent retention.

The need for more structure leads to the third aspect to consider: the creation of a cyber battalion. Currently, the Reserve DCO-IDM companies are subordinate to 6th Comm Battalion. In contrast, the active duty DCO-IDM Companies are subordinate to their respective Marine Information Groups, whose staff structure provides 17xx positions and command opportunity. Having 17xx experience and credibility within the higher headquarters provides the accessible expertise to effectively plan and coordinate cyber operations for and with their respective MEFs and other supported units. The Reserve DCO-IDM companies require the same: a higher headquarters familiar and focused on the occupational field's function and mission essential tasks and provides positions and command opportunities for higher ranks that currently do not exist. Once the battalion is established, in a matter of course, the issue of career progression will resolve itself.

In these times of fiscal strain and foundational structural change, the Marine Corps has a low-cost, low-risk opportunity to build critical capacity through restructuring the reserve cyber component. Providing career growth, structure, and operational support for existing reservists as well as active duty Marines that are transitioning into the civilian sector will ensure that the unique and hard to build talent that exists in the cyber Marine remains where it is needed most, working to address the dynamic cyber battlefield in the decades to come.

