

Where Does Prior Service Recruiting Fit?

Recruiting Command or Marine Forces Reserve?

by CIV Steve Wittle

April 2021 marks the twentieth anniversary of Prior Service Recruiting (PSR) assignment to Marine Corps Recruiting Command (MCRC). The Marine Requirements and Oversight Committee (MROC) decision 19-2001 directed the reassignment of PSR from Marine Forces Reserve (MFR) to MCRC. At this milestone, in reference to the *38th Commandant's Planning Guidance*, it is fitting to assess the efficacy of that decision. The following provides background on what led to the change twenty years ago, what was discovered and changed in the subsequent years, and what we should consider for the future.

Origins to Integration

MCRC was activated operationally on 1 January 1994. Prior to that date, all non-prior service (NPS) enlisted and officer recruiting activities (even before the inception of the All-Volunteer Force in 1973) were the responsibility of the Personnel Procurement Division, of Manpower and Reserve Affairs, (M&RA), Headquarters Marine Corps. With MCRC's establishment, the responsibility of NPS enlisted and officer recruiting was placed under one commander—the CG of MCRC. As noted in the current *MCO 1130.56D, Total Force Recruiting*, “the CG, MCRC is responsible to CMC for developing, justifying, planning, organizing, conducting and administering total force personnel procurement programs to meet the manpower need of the Marine Corps.” At the time PSR was inte-

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grated, MCRC personnel procurement was solely entry level.

In 1982, PSR was established to address the Marine Corps Reserve end-strength requirements. Prior to 1982, each respective reserve unit and inspector-instructor staff was responsible for finding and recruiting their prior service (PS) requirements. Specifically, PSR was created to provide a dedicated force—

affiliations, when combined with NPS accessions and reserve unit retention, delivered the reserve manpower requirements necessary for mobilization.

Prior to integration, PS recruiters attended the same Basic Recruiter Course (BRC) and were assigned the same MOS as NPS recruiters and career recruiters (8411 and 8412, respectively). To attain the 8411 MOS, PSR Marines were assigned to attend BRC, just like their counterparts assigned to NPS recruiting even though BRC focused predominately on recruiting NPS applicants for entry-level service. The BRC curriculum teaches the fundamentals essential for NPS recruiter success, (e.g.

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comprised of Marines serving in what is now called the Active Reserve (AR) Program—to canvas the Marine Corps Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) for PS Marines for affiliation with the Selected Marine Corps Reserve or designated reserve support augmentation. Given that the IRR is comprised of a trained and experienced cohort of Marines who have completed their initial service obligation, the pool offered a ready cadre of Marines capable of filling reserve NCO, SNCO, and officer billets. PSR

prospecting high school students, preparing delayed entry program members for recruit training, building rapport in local communities to generate referrals, etc.). Nearly 50 percent of the BRC curriculum did not apply to the PSR recruiters who make contact with Marines in the IRR or those about to transition from the active component. To compensate for the course deficiencies, PS recruiters graduating attended a follow up two-week follow-on course conducted by the reserve establishment

to address the nuances, duties, and responsibilities associated with the PSR mission. Although well-intentioned, since both organizations were under different commands, the MOS designation error and unfulfilling curriculum remained undetected while PSR was aligned under reserve control and only discovered after integration with MCRC was directed.

In 1989, a question was raised as to why PSR was not aligned with NPS recruiting. The basic premise was PS recruiters could be integrated with their NPS counterparts because they had the same training and capabilities. To validate and determine potential economies of effort, an assessment was undertaken by M&RA in July 1989. This allowed for the exploration into the utility of creating a Marine Corps Personnel Procurement and Retention Command, with PSR operationally controlled under that organization while remaining administratively controlled by the reserve establishment. The construct to consolidate all recruiting under one commander promised a more streamlined and efficient total force recruiting effort. Reserve leadership—in what is today MFR—supported consolidation, but dissent came from the subordinate reserve support command and other elements within M&RA. The dissent was based on the two missions being dissimilar and that consolidation would lead to the disruption of both efforts. Thus, there was strong opposition to linking retention and recruiting functions, and as a result, the Deputy Chief of Staff (DC/S) for M&RA—known today as the Deputy Commandant—decided to maintain status quo.

In March 1992, DC/S M&RA and the CG, 4th MarDiv established a joint process action team to study the issue of integration. The guidance to the team was to assess the potential for savings by integrating the two, and whether or not such savings could accrue without degradation in quality accessions. The team drafted a report that recommended moving PSR from the Marine Corps Reserve Support Command (MCRSC) to Personnel Procurement Division (MR), M&RA. After reviewing the proposal, MajGen C.C. Krulak,

then director of MR, counseled against integration, noting ongoing challenges in the NPS recruiting arena. Similarly, MCRSC expressed opposition to many of the report's recommendations. However, one of the recommendations was for future studies; it should be conducted by a disinterested party with no connection to either recruiting or the reserves.

1998 CMFR and the CG, MCRC jointly chartered another PSR integration study. Co-chaired by Col O.J. Milano and Col D.R. Selvage, the 1998 study provided a comprehensive analysis of PSR. They examined past studies and working groups in an attempt to determine if any changes to the status quo would be in the best interests of the Marine Corps. Their approach

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In November 1994, the Naval Audit Service examined whether to consolidate PSR and NPS recruiting. The findings unequivocally recommended consolidation citing a potential savings of 48 billets after revising methods of assigning mission quotas. Both the reserve establishment, MCRSC and MFR, as well as MCRC rejected that assertion as factually flawed and underpins an erroneous conclusion. MCRSC added a response to the recommendation:

Prior service recruiting currently provides the Commander, Marine Forces Reserve (CMFR) the flexibility and control needed to meet Reserve manpower requirements. It is extremely important that Reserve readiness not be further degraded by tampering with a highly reliable, responsive and effective element of the Reserve Forces.

The issue was again reviewed in early 1997, although no formal group was chartered. The report included an information paper from MCRSC that essentially reaffirmed its past position:

PSR, as currently organized, is the most effective organization to accomplish the prior service mission; CMFR needs to retain control over PSR in order to ensure readiness goals are met and missions are so different between PSR and NPS recruiting that it would be detrimental to mission accomplishment to integrate the two.

Given the foundational fractures underpinning the 1997 study, in July

was to answer the basic question of “What changed since the last study?” The in-depth review concluded that much had changed. For example, the Marine Corps established a recruiting command that was considered to be the premier recruiting organization of all the armed forces. In addition, the adoption of technology and automation across the recruiting process increased speed and efficiency while extending the commander's span of control and reducing overhead at all echelons of command. Lastly, reserve recruiting had become more sophisticated in market analysis by establishing a Transitional Recruiter force at major bases and stations. The intent of the Transitional Recruiting force was to have a dedicated organization contact Marines transitioning from the active component for affiliation with the Marine Corps reserve. This force along with PSR made for a robust recruiting component for the reserves.

The comprehensive study of July 1998 recommended integration with the following conclusions:

1. MFR was willing to sacrifice control.
2. MFR was confident MCRCs mission force combined with advances in process and technology would yield mission success.
3. Integration was in the best interest of the Marine Corps.

Although there had been numerous examinations over the decade preced-

ing the integration decision, there was never a clear distinction between the missions and processes of PSR and NPS recruiting. That side-by-side comparison was never strongly made, especially in the July 1998 study. The absence of a direct comparison in the 1998 study led to assumptions regarding the remedy of systematic differences and weighted the assumed benefits of integration. Those conclusions convinced leadership, there was little risk with integration and potentially greater gains. Therefore, the subsequent decision by the MROC was to direct PSR integration with MCRC.

Discovery and Challenges after Integration

Some facts that had not been clearly articulated to the MROC started to surface during the early phases of integration. Those facts imposed limits, altering future actions to fully integrate. The integration plan as outlined in the July 1998 study concluded and recommended PSR recruiters be assigned under the cognizance and direction of the local Recruiting Station commanding officer (RS CO). The RS CO is charged with leading and directing recruiting activities for NPS enlisted and officer mission attainment. The recruiting station composed of recruiting sub-station (RSS) and officer selection team(s) were already pursuing a daunting mission: recruiting, preparing, and shipping the requisite quantity and quality of recruits to recruit training and the procurement of officer candidates for eventual commissioning. That RS CO would now have an additional responsibility for the PSR mission assigned to that station.

To physically integrate PSR, the initial plan was to insert the PS recruiter into the existing RSS structure. The thought was PS recruiters could be employed if necessary to meet any mission assigned to that recruiting station. However, integration with the RSS separated the PS recruiter from the reserve unit locations and the Marines with whom they directly support. To preserve the PS recruiter relationship with the reserve unit, a decision was made to keep PS recruiters in their existing offices at reserve centers.

On the cusp of implementing the strategy, MCRC discovered a conflict with the statutory limits on the duties of AR Marines. *Title 10 U.S. Code* specifically limits the employment of AR Marines to supporting the Marine Corps Reserve. Placing PSR within the recruiting station with its NPS regular mission was determined to conflict with the statutory employment of AR Marines. As such, the 1998 study's quest for anticipated manpower savings and efficiencies largely evaporated. Such a revelation prompted the retention of pre-integration supervisory structure and the PSR Officer-in-Charge and their staffs at the Marine Corps District (MCD) headquarters. Aside from the PSR tactical command element officer-in-charge rank changing from lieutenant colonel to major, there were not the personnel savings as anticipated as a result of integration.

hood of success, and are dependent on reserve center locations, IRR population, travel limitations, MOS and Billet Identification Code matches, etc. All these elements are vital to PSR success but simply do not align with the NPS population/demographics essential to achieving the NPS recruiting mission. Early in the transition, MCRC discovered that the PSR geographic laydown does not comport with the MCD and recruiting region boundaries.

In an effort to better align the MCD geographic boundaries and resources, MCRC turned to its National Structure Working Group, a standing body used to assess recruiting organizations, their missions, and the match of demographics and resources to the likelihood of mission success. The National Structure Working Group's effort is to ensure MCRC structure on the ground aligns optimally with the market where Ma-

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Another challenge with the integration of PSR was having the lowest command and control element at the MCD level. This did not optimize the structuring of PSR since the MCD boundaries are constructed geographically and demographically to align with the NPS eligible market. In simple terms, MCD geographic boundaries are drawn so NPS recruiters are located where their target population (17–24-year-old youth) along with other factors such as command and control, balance between recruiting stations, etc. MCD also are located within a respective Marine Corps Recruit Depot/ Recruiting Regions. All this geographic laydown is driven by alignment with the recruiting market, optimum command and control, and the shipping of new recruits to a respective recruit depot.

To the contrary, PSR eligible market demographics differ significantly from NPS. PSR boundaries are drawn to afford a commander with the likeli-

ness will be operating to target and recruit. The technological advancements in modeling since integration in 2002 has allowed MCRC to test proposed structural changes. This capability is vital for future planning and forecasting the alignment of recruiting assets to the available market. In 2019, a modeling exercise was conducted exclusively for PSR indicated sub-optimal alignment largely driven by district and region boundaries. It should be noted that the alignment of PSR within the NPS structure is not severe enough to jeopardize PSR mission success, but it does prove that integration had not yielded benefits to PSR structurally. The model did provide a conceptualized PSR laydown if they were not encumbered by the NPS boundaries. A comparison of the current geographic boundary alignment and modelled optimal boundary is provided in the following illustrations.

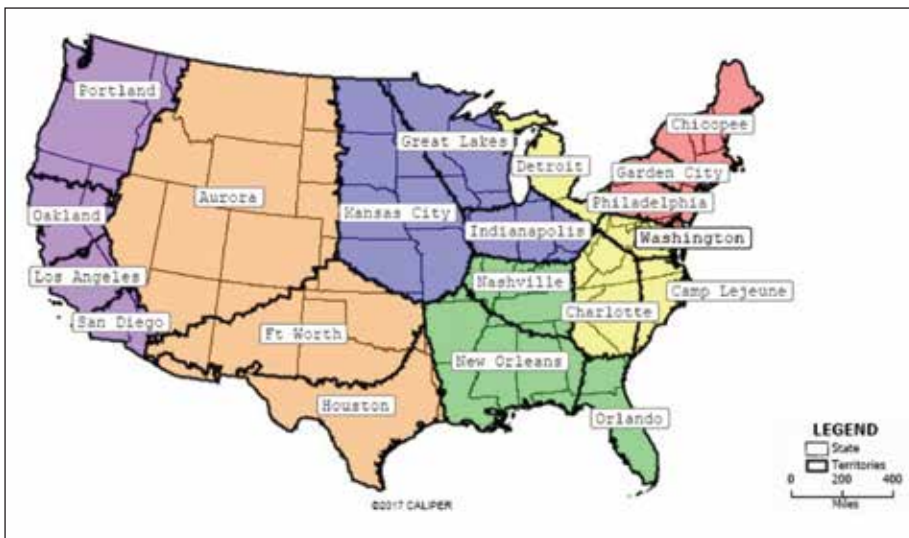
The integration of technological database tracking and management



Current PSR structure geographic boundaries. (Map provided by author.)

was another challenge that had to be overcome. Throughout the mid to late 90s, MCRSC developed a unique accounting system to track and manage the mission of PSR. The Automated Leads Management and Reporting System (ALMRS) generated leads for PSRs by collecting input from Marine Corps Total Force System, Transitional Recruiting (TR) and other sources for Marines in the IRR. ALMRS was designed to track prospects from start to finish to ensure proper reporting of all affiliations. ALMRS was built and maintained on Lotus Notes, a legacy

software platform the Marine Corps was divesting from in early 2000s. Despite MCRSC and Reserve Affairs (RA) assurances that the capabilities and functions of ALMRS were simple and easy to maintain and support, MCRC expressed significant concerns about the absence of configuration security, software program management, and funding for transitioning to a platform other than Lotus Notes. Although MCRC's concerns were noted, the transition proceeded and ultimately impacted the cost, schedule, and performance of the NPS accounting system, MCRC



Model optimized structure geographic boundaries (unconstrained by Mcd/Region). (Map provided by author.)

used to track enlisted and officer accessions. Over the ensuing two decades, policy changes, cybersecurity compliance requirements and other aspects of post deployment software support have continued to demand resourcing and attention.

While previous studies predicted mission success after integration, they failed to address the shortcomings in doctrine and training across the doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities framework. The adhoc efforts by MFR, for PSR before integration, was inadequate and not sustainable. The shortcomings identified during the initial stages of integration prompted MCRC to commence a multi-year development plan with associated resourcing to field formal training courses and sustainment materials tailored to PSR. Those products were designed exclusively to address the requirements for training a basic PSR recruiter, a staff non-commissioned officer-in-charge, along with products to enhance the professional development of the PSR career force. The previous experience by MCRC of cultivating similar products for the exclusive use by the Career Retention force provided a template on how to do the same for PSR. Implementing integration confirmed missions were different between NPS and PSR so training products had to be designed for those operational differences. Two decades later, PSR now has a full portfolio of formal courses and training materials specifically tailored to meet the technical proficiency and professional development necessary to sustain mission success. In addition, this is capped off with a separate MOS for PS recruiters (8421) and career PS recruiters (8422).

An examination of *MCO 1130.76 D, Conduct of Recruiting Operations*, lays out the authorities that CG, MCRC has with Total Force Recruiting. This order codifies the *Enlisted Processing Manual* and *Officer Commissioning Manual* for entry into the Marine Corps. In laymen's terms, the CG, MCRC is granted the final adjudicating authority for all NPS applicants seeking enlistment or a commission into the Marine Corps on

behalf of the CMC. That culminating authority does not apply to PSR actions. In the case of PSR, the final adjudication process mirrors career retention. Marine Corps Reserve affiliation final reviews or waivers adjudication authority ultimately resides with M&RA. Although the CG, MCRC has operational control of PSR, that does not include full operational process adjudication. That substantive difference did not change after integration.

At the time PSR was integrated into MCRC, there was an organic element known as TR. TR's mission was to establish contact with Marines transitioning from the active component for direct affiliation into the reserves. TR was designed to tap into the large population of first-term Marines who decided to end their active service. There were two designated TR centers and eight transitional sites at posts and stations established to connect TR recruiters with transitioning Marines. In 2007, MFR and RA decided to divest this element from MCRC and pass responsibility for transitional recruiting efforts to Mobilization Command under MFR. MCRC lost ten AR billets when that program was divested. When to Mobilization Command was divested in 2011, M&RA established Reserve Transitional Coordinators to handle those responsibilities. In 2017, responsibilities for re-establishing a transition program reverted back to MCRC without the restoration of the corresponding ten AR Marines who previously worked this program in what is now known as the Direct Affiliation Program. Though MCRC quickly rekindled efforts to maximize the benefits of Direct Affiliation Program as a compliment to PSR mission, the atrophy of systematic recruiting knowledge, skills and abilities lost while outside of MCRC oversight limited impact for mission success. In hindsight, the decision to dismantle the TR structure and focus was short sighted.

In January 2013, a concept was proposed to consolidate PSR and AR career planners. LtCol Shawn Wonderlich presented a comprehensive brief that contained the historical references of discussions and working group efforts,

prior to integration, to gain a unity of effort for recruiting and retention in MFR. Interestingly, it is noted in his brief that MFR was developing a PSR/ Career Planning consolidation initiative in May 2000. That consolidation initiative planning effort was supposed to be followed with the development of a proof-of-concept test in early 2001 at select MFR sites. The plan and proof-of-concept testing was shelved with the MROC decision to integrate PSR into MCRC.

The proposed concept was to combine PSR and reserve career planning efforts into a force of 217 AR Marines dedicated to "recruiting and retention" for MFR manning and readiness. Synchronizing PSR and reserve retention efforts would allow for the coverage of gaps between reserve commands by employing a unified effort to fill billet vacancies in MFR units. The brief acknowledged the on-going efforts by MCRC in creating a stand-alone MOS for PSR as well as infrastructure enhancements in relevant training and iterative structure/laydown review process. It also noted that PSR Marines are already proficient with processing Total Force Retention System requests for reenlistments, extensions, and retraining of Marines into MFR from the IRR.

If such an initiative were adopted, it would drive new concepts of operations envisioned for reserve recruiting and retention following concept of operations was envisioned for recruiting and retention within MFR:

- Generate new mission metrics that would incorporate overall unit strength.
- Create a transitional force that could systematically market toward the active component for reserve affiliation.
- Focus Individual Mobilization Augmentation and AR recruitment across the entire force.

The proposals outlined in this concept are innovative and comprehensive ideas to address readiness and retention in MFR. As stated in the proposal PSR is a natural fit in supporting the tenants of this concept going forward. Is it now time to move forward with a closer examination of this proposal?

Where does PSR fit?

In 2001, it appeared logical to integrate PSR into MCRC. Chronicled above are the enhancements, solutions and evolution that have occurred over the last twenty years from the PSR integration into MCRC. It is also accounts for the genuine attempts to achieve recruiting symmetry by MCRC. As discovered, the nature and mission of PSR prevents the desired ultimate alignment with NPS recruiting. Using that backdrop, it is appropriate on this anniversary to conduct an objective analysis of PSR and map out a way ahead for its future. Some questions that should be considered include:

- Should PSR remain under MCRC?
- Should final adjudication continue to reside under M&RA?
- Should control be under MFR, since the activities of PSR mirror those of retention?
- Should PSR and reserve career retention be consolidated and managed by one organization? Which one?

To answer those questions, an analysis should be conducted by a joint working group from M&RA, MFR, and MCRC. The precept for this working group should be guided by one fundamental objective: The future alignment and control of PSR to optimally supports the evolving manpower and readiness requirements of MFR. Satisfying that objective identifies the future path for PSR while appropriately shaping the course of action that aligns over-all responsibilities for associated supporting functions to meet that requirement. Attaining unity of effort and accountability in that endeavor would support and enhance reserve readiness.

