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# This is NOT your Daddy's Draftee Army!

## Erasing conscription mentality in the Marine Corps

by  
Major Brendan B. McBreen

**Today's highly trained, professional Marine Corps is still hobbled by many outdated conscription-era practices. During the coming century, the significant improvements to the combat effectiveness of the Marine Corps will not come from new equipment or doctrine, but from a transformation of our antiquated personnel and training practices.**

The American way of war in the 20th century was defined by conscription. The mobilizations required for four major conflicts have shaped the U.S. military. Although the Marine Corps has little experience with conscription, DoD practices developed during World War I, World War II, Korea and Vietnam still remain. Congress and the Department of Defense (DoD) define some of our outdated practices through laws and regulations based on mobilization requirements.

Former Secretary of the Navy Richard Danzig once said that the services were “infected by the psychology of

conscription.” Evidence of this “Draftee Army Mentality” or “D.A.M.” can be found in Marine Corps training, doctrine, and manning practices, where in many cases, we still treat both Marines and leaders as inexpensive, low-skilled, replaceable individuals. These practices are long out-of-date and prevent us from maximizing the contributions of today's skilled Marines.

For conflicts in the next century, the Marine Corps will field a competent, long-service, professional force. To excel in the 21st century, we need to find and root out the D.A.M. practices that constrain our combat effectiveness.

### **Where are we going?**

Future war will emphasize quality over quantity. In “Skill and Technology in Modern Warfare” (*Joint Forces Quarterly*, Summer 1999), the authors demonstrate that despite advances in technology, military skill still trumps technology. Advancing technology now separates skilled and unskilled armies. The decentralized

nature of future combat will demand increasingly lower levels of authority and autonomy, and increasingly higher levels of individual skill, judgment, and competence. This trend benefits armies that develop high quality manpower. In *The Postmodern Military*, Moskos, Williams, and Segal describe the trend among western armies to move from larger conscripted forces to smaller volunteer forces with multipurpose missions. Only long-term regulars can be trained to meet the flexibility requirements of the future. The United States, now entering a new “age of empire,” needs expeditionary legions capable of fulfilling a wider range of missions than the single-purpose forces of the world wars. Our current operations around the world reinforce these trends.

The Marine Corps' concepts for future weapons, organizations, and doctrine need versatile Marine units. New command and control infrastructure will enable smaller, more capable forces to

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operate in decentralized ways. As commandant, General Krulak spoke of the importance of the “Strategic Corporal,” the NCO who makes decisions that affect the regional commander, the president, and national policy. This linkage underscores the importance of high-quality individual Marines. Our transformation into the future will be based on our people, Marines, leaders, and units, who will be significantly more capable than they are today.

### **Where have we come from?**

In the 20th century, the U.S. military has been shaped by four big wars and a series of DoD reorganizations. Work practices of the industrial age, designed to deal with low-skilled workers and low levels of information availability, were used to build our industrial age forces. Our Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) model, tied to a training pipeline and an individual replacement system, is basically an industrial spare parts system.

Lessons from the World War II mobilization drove Cold War planning and policies. The Officer Personnel Act of 1947 and the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA) of 1981 used Cold War mobilization requirements to establish the “up or out” promotion system, the “all or nothing” twenty-year retirement plan, and the specific numbers of officers needed by each service. Mobilization requirements drove us to maintain mirror-image reserve forces.

The modern Marine Corps, one of the products of these

complex interactions, now finds itself built on a foundation of outdated assumptions. The highly skilled units we need cannot be formed from marginally trained individuals and industrial-age practices. Our cold war priorities are now irrelevant when designing forces, weapons, policies, and war plans.

### **Daddy’s Draftee Army**

Some of our policies are so well established that few can imagine other ways of doing business. The largely conscript U.S. armies of the last century were built on a number of assumptions: (1) *Mobilization*. Peacetime forces are only a cadre on which to build a wartime force of new units. (2) *Leader Semi-competence*. Mobilization promotes regular officers rapidly. Small units are led by newly-trained officers. (3) *Mass is more important than skill*. Fielding and fighting large numbers of new units takes precedence over training existing units. Creating a unit is accomplished merely by providing it with a large number of individuals. (4) *Low Training Standards*. The rapid training pipeline can only produce marginally trained individuals.

A side effect of these assumptions is our shallow readiness criteria. Because combat readiness is difficult to measure, measurements of effectiveness are based on mobilization parameters that are easy to track and measure: numbers of individuals, equipment inventories, and maintenance statistics.

**Doctrine.** Because leader competence cannot be assumed, a mobilization army creates prescriptive doctrine that attempts to address every problem a leader may face. The language of manuals is repetitive and exhaustingly detailed. Because mobilization creates a mass army of marginally trained units, tactics are kept simple, emphasizing strength in numbers and minimizing the need for skilled units.

**Organization.** To create many identical units, standardization is emphasized. All units, regardless of mission, have the same equipment, organization, and doctrine. The importance of unit cohesion is largely ignored.

**Training.** Entry-level training of a mobilization army emphasizes throughput of individuals. Large student-to-instructor ratios and low training standards permit rapid execution of the training schedule. “Numbers of men training” is a shallow measure of effectiveness. Unit training is not emphasized.

**Material.** A draftee army tracks amount of equipment maintained as a shallow measure of combat potential.

**Leadership.** A mobilization army’s hasty leadership training relies on rote memorization of doctrinal and tactical rules. Authoritative leadership is required to control masses of under trained leaders and units. Leaders are rotated quickly through numerous billets to get cursory experience, further de-emphasizing the importance of unit training and unit cohesion.

**People.** The draftee army views individuals and leaders as inexpensive, low-skilled, replaceable labor. People are processed in and out of units like spare parts. Competent leaders are transferred out of unit to make room for leaders-in-training.

### Where are we now?

Today's Marine Corps has high quality people. We have tremendous facilities, schools, and units, led by talented leaders. Yet twenty-five years after the advent of the all-volunteer force, we sometimes still treat our Marines as inexpensive, replaceable, and low skilled labor. Improvements to our combat power can only be made when the following D.A.M. practices are addressed.

**Doctrine.** Our *MCDP-1 Warfighting* doctrine requires an idealized organization that does not yet exist. *Warfighting* envisions professional leaders, who share a common tactical education and doctrinal view of the battlefield, who trust each other and can communicate intuitively, leading highly skilled, cohesive, and well-trained units. The Marine Corps has made great strides on the education side, but our units, suffering from excessive leader and personnel disruption and haphazard training, still have far to go.

Outside our keystone series of doctrinal manuals, most of our tactical manuals are overly prescriptive. Why do we still see:

- Cooperative planning processes designed for large

headquarters forced onto battalions and companies?

**D.A.M!**

- Overly detailed operations orders? **D.A.M!** Authoritative direction, required by conscript armies, inhibits initiative and flexibility.

**Organization.** Although our MAGTF concept is strong and flexible, most of our standing ground units are World War II designs. Historically, units led by marginally trained leaders suffered more casualties. Do we still believe that mass is more important than skill? Why do we still see:

- Overly large staffs? Assistant Commanders? Executive Officers? **D.A.M!** Mobilization created these billets for uncertain commanders who needed help. This is no longer true.
- Individual Replacements? Readiness reports that focus solely on numbers of Marines and numbers of weapons? **D.A.M!** We often ignore unit cohesion to maintain high personnel numbers. Will our future combat replacements be sent from school straight to combat, as in the past, ignoring unit training responsibilities and unit cohesion?
- 68% first term population? **D.A.M!** Personnel turbulence is our most glaring draftee legacy. Leaders spend most of their time re-training people and re-inventing procedures. Time, talent, and money are wasted.

**Training.** Although Marine Corps entry-level training is

long and expensive, many aspects still reflect a D.A.M. Career courses and schools should be far more rigorous. Unit training receives less emphasis. Schools prepare Marines for units. *Units* prepare Marines for combat. Why do we still see:

- Schools with low training standards? High student-to-instructor ratios? **D.A.M!**
- Rote memorization of mnemonics, formats, and tactical formulas? **D.A.M!** Memorizing acronyms is an entry-level skill.
- Lack of promotion standards for NCOs? **D.A.M!**
- A huge training emphasis on school training and very little emphasis on unit training? **D.A.M!** Where do we fence training time and resources for combat units?
- Regulations restricting unit training by NCOs? **D.A.M!** NCOs are our primary trainers. Ranges, vehicles and ammunition must be entrusted to these NCO trainers.
- Officer schools with no entrance requirements and no graduation requirements? **D.A.M!** *Attendance* at school has become the criterion for promotion. Lack of foreign language requirements for officers? **D.A.M!**

**Material.** Unlike a draftee army, we buy expensive and complex equipment uniquely tailored to our doctrine.

**Leadership.** Today's Marine Corps leaders are professional and capable. Why do we see:

- Short command tours? **D.A.M!** Short tours create leaders and units with conscription-level competence. NCO authority is weakened by short-tenure commanders hesitant to risk delegating authority or accepting mistakes.
- Too many officers? **D.A.M!** Mobilization requirements, legislated by DOPMA, created many extra mid-grade officers and billets to keep them employed.

**People.** In the Marine Corps, people are our most valuable resource. The Marine Corps has made great improvements in family support, housing, pay, benefits, life-long education, and other quality of life efforts. We recruit the individual, but retain the family. Families are a source of support and stability and increase our readiness. DOPMA, however, still requires:

- “Up or out” promotion. **D.A.M!**
- “All or nothing” twenty year retirement? **D.A.M!**

**Facilities.** Marine Corps facilities are inadequately supported. Our civilian professionals should do everything not directly connected with training. Marines need to train for combat. Using Marines for base maintenance made sense when our manpower was low skilled. Today, when we wouldn’t ask a computer programmer to cut the grass outside his office, why do we still ask our highly trained Marines? Why do we still see:

- Fatigue work? Maintenance details, grass, paint, and police, taking precedence over readiness? **D.A.M!** We cannot *afford* to pay Marines to cut the grass!
- Facilities, gym, messhall, pool, augmentation? **D.A.M!** Do we not have the ability man these organizations without taxing units that are training for combat?

Our management of our Marines’ time and talent is rightly interpreted as organizational indifference. Marines know when their efforts are being wasted, undervalued and under-appreciated. This is quality of life. This is retention. This is readiness. Some of these practices still reflect our heritage of low skilled, replaceable Marines, leaders and units. Our future organization requires new ideas.

### What is to be done?

*Manpower.* Personnel policy is the hub of the readiness wheel. The Marine Corps needs a “Strategic Plan for Manpower” that defines how we will gain the maximum effectiveness and the maximum combat potential from our skilled Marines, leaders, and units. Our philosophy is quality over quantity. We need to define new manpower practices for a corps of long service professionals. We are moving forward with new technology. We are edging forward with emerging doctrine and concepts, but we’re mired in a personnel system built on industrial age and Cold War assumptions. We need to

capture the actual value of our people and emphasize the lost opportunity costs of misemploying them.

*Manpower.* Stabilize units to improve cohesion. Marines, especially leaders, should serve for four years in the same unit. Marines should be moved in batches only during planned unit reconstitution windows.

*Manpower.* Prioritize units over individuals. Professional forces field long-service cohesive units. Cohesion is a retention tool as well as a training and combat capability tool. We need to develop a replacement plan that supports unit cohesion.

*TECOM.* Support unit collective training to the same degree as entry-level individual training. Increase training standards in schools and in the fleet. Reduce student-to-instructor ratios toward a goal of 12:1.

*Total Force Structure.* Re-organize reserve forces to create augmentation forces. Shape our tables of organization to support our future doctrine.

*External.* We need an update to DOPMA. Change “up or out” to “up or stay.” Tailor numbers of officers to meet emerging service-specific concepts.

### Conclusion

The Marine Corps cannot afford to retain long-outdated, conscription-based personnel and training practices. Wasting talent will not just become increasingly costly in a world of rapid change, it will be a critical lost opportunity. We will modernize our equipment. Our

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doctrine will evolve.  
Exponential improvements,  
however, will only come when  
we transform our personnel  
policies to support our long

service, highly competent,  
professional force. Our people  
– Marines, leaders, and units –  
are our true combat multiplier.  
The quality of our people and

our personnel policies will drive  
the transformation of the  
Marine Corps.

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*Major McBreen is currently serving on a corporate fellowship with the ExxonMobil Corporation.*

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