

## New Emphasis on Quality-of-Life Programs

# Only As Good As the People

By MICHAEL F. KASTRE

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Sea power is more than high-technology platforms and weapon systems. It also requires personnel readiness—which means, among other things, recruiting and retaining good people, training them, and keeping them happy.

It is for that reason, according to Lt. Gen. George R. Christmas, the Marine Corps' deputy chief of staff for manpower/reserve affairs, that the Corps believes very strongly that quality of life is a readiness issue. "It must fit into all those things that make the Marine Corps ready to do what the nation needs us to do," he says.

Carolyn Becraft, deputy assistant secretary of defense for personnel support, families, and education, agrees, and

points out that Secretary of Defense William J. Perry "has made quality of life one of his top priorities."

### The Married Military

Quality of life in the military has taken on a new meaning since the effective cancellation of the draft in 1976 and the move to an all-volunteer force. Before the end of conscription, over three-quarters of all sailors and Marines were single; today, more than half are married and have children. As a result, such elements of everyday living as housing, child care, and youth programs have become major morale issues in today's Navy and Marine Corps communities.

"Every person views quality of life a little differently, depending on his or her particular circumstances," says Rear Adm. Larry R. Marsh, assistant chief of naval personnel for personnel readiness and community support. "It depends on a number of things—for example, whether you are single or married, whether you have a family or not, and whether you are male or female. It involves everything you do that affects your daily comings and goings."

He and other experts agree, however, that quality of life in the military community generally encompasses: active-duty compensation and retiree pay; edu-

*Sports and other MWR (morale, welfare, and recreation) programs receive greater emphasis, and more funding, in today's Navy. Photo here shows members of the USS George Washington rugby team fighting for control of the ball during a game with a local rugby club during a 7-11 March port visit to Marseille, France, by the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier.*



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Rear Adm. Larry R. Marsh, assistant chief of naval personnel for personnel readiness and community support, says that "Every person views quality of life a little differently, depending on his or her particular circumstances." Shown here are Lt. Cdr. Don Howell, assigned to the training carrier USS John F. Kennedy, with his wife Mary and newborn daughter following the ship's arrival at its new homeport, Mayport, Fla., and sailors aboard the nuclear-powered carrier USS George Washington viewing a mosque in Port Suez, Egypt, during the ship's transit through the Suez canal.

cational opportunities, health care, and the family issues cited above; PCS (permanent change of station) moves; overseas deployments—particularly when a member's family has to be left behind; and morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR) programs (which are partially funded from the profits generated by the military exchange system).

The growing concern with the military's changing demographics led to the appointment of a 19-member Defense Science Board Quality of Life Task Force. On the task force\* were a number of retired flag and general officers, several senior enlisted personnel, and former DOD civilian leaders.

The task force delivered its 117-page final report—which takes a hard look at how the services deploy their members, house their families, and care for their children—to Perry on 12 October 1995. Congress is now in the process of approving a range of initiatives to tackle the challenges and issues identified in the task force report, including the creation of a military housing authority.

According to Rep. Floyd Spence (R-S.C.), chairman of the House National Security Committee, readiness and morale are in jeopardy if quality-of-life issues are not addressed as a high priority. Pay, benefits, and housing are not "extras" in the defense budget, Spence says—they are key determinants of the nation's ability to retain the caliber of personnel needed in an all-volunteer military force.

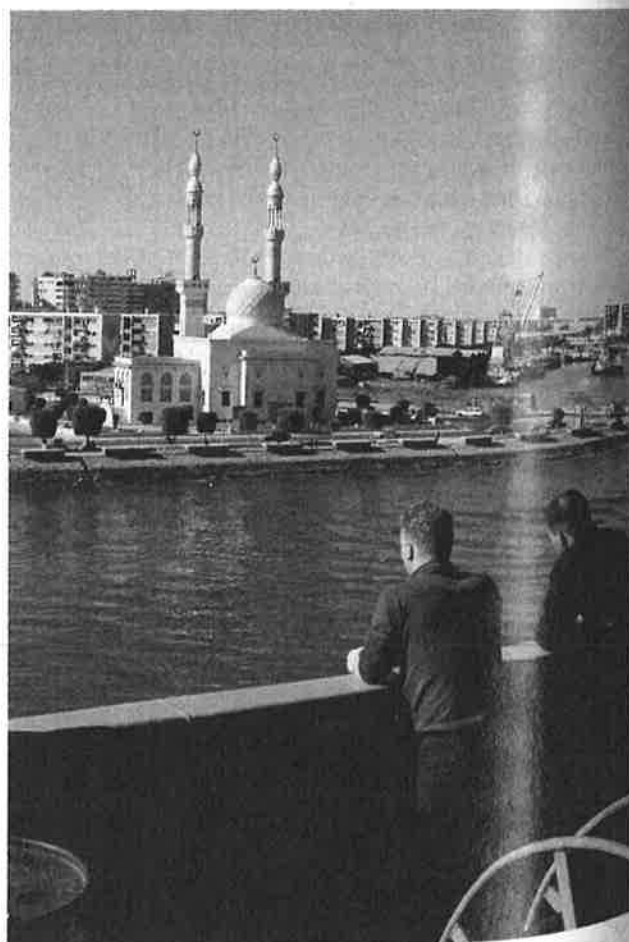
### Mortgages and Methodologies

The recommendation to privatize some military housing was a top legislative priority. To implement that authority Perry established the Housing Revitalization Support Office. Its director, Robert Meyer, notes that DOD now has "a range of authorities—like limited partnership authority [with the private sector] and mortgage insurance authority."

Meyer's office is in the process of developing methodologies and models to evaluate housing test sites to determine probable construction costs, rents, and other data. The goal is to see what types of subsidies and/or other programs are needed to allow private builders to build and maintain adequate units near bases at a price service members can afford. "The goal is to leverage military construction funds by a ratio of at least 3 to 1," says Meyer.

"It's a tough balancing act," adds Peter Potochney, OSD's director for housing within installations. "We are trying to fix

\* The task force was headed by former Army Secretary John O. Marsh—references to Marsh in this article are to Rear Adm. Marsh rather than to Secretary Marsh. Also working with the panel were former House Minority Leader Robert M. Michel (R-Ill.) and former Secretary of the Navy Sean O'Keefe.



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a problem which has been developing over 30 years," he points out.

According to James M. DeFrancia, a member of the task force, the privatization initiative "is going to require the creation and involvement of some unique private-sector and military organizations." DeFrancia played a major role in convincing the task force that a private housing program could succeed. "By moving it [housing] into the private sector," he says, "I think we will have the ability to deal with the financial requirements in a different fashion—one that will enable the services to get the maximum for the money."

### Satisfaction Index Varies

Sailors and Marines are concerned about issues other than housing, of course. The fifth annual BuPers (Bureau of Naval Personnel) survey of the fleet shows that only 13 percent of the Navy's enlisted members who responded were satisfied with their basic pay, compared to 43 percent of the officers. Almost 70 percent of all respondents agreed, though, that putting more exercise equipment on ships would be a valuable quality-of-life investment, and approximately 80 percent of those surveyed said that base recreational facilities, such as tennis courts and swimming pools, are "very important" to morale. Not surprisingly, these are among the key issues now being addressed by the Navy.

The top priorities, though, according to Marsh, are still pay, housing, and medical services—and, beyond that, "the broad area of community and family support."

"We are," he says, "trying our best to maximize our limited resources to increase child care through specific initiatives to support child care that is delivered in homes, as well as outsourcing or contracting with civilian child development centers."

"Another area we are pleased about," he says, "is that for fiscal year 1997 we have put \$22.5 million into MWR to fund fitness centers—mostly aboard ships. And we are expanding our educational programs." By the end of the year, Marsh says, the Navy hopes to have finished setting up interactive computer systems that will enable personnel stationed at sea to participate in self-paced college programs. Prototype sites also have been established to provide shore-based sailors with the same opportunity to gain college credits, and current plans call for more installations to be similarly equipped.

Marsh says that the service will continue using instructors for some courses, especially on larger ships. He notes that there is an added benefit derived from increasing funding for educational programs. "Today, we are finding that about 30 percent of the sailors coming into the Navy need some type of refresher education—reading, writing, and arithmetic." The interactive computer system includes a functional skills component, Marsh says, "that allows personnel to address this need for additional education."

### Credit-Card Counseling

The Navy also is strengthening its personal financial management counseling programs to keep sailors from becoming over-extended with credit card debt and other financial burdens. More and better training for ombudsmen is another top priority—the ombudsman is a Navy spouse who works directly for the commanding officer, monitoring family concerns and providing a direct link to families.

Deployment issues also are being addressed. "We are working to improve our deployment support programs, with special emphasis on 'return and reunion,'" says Marsh. Major changes to the Navy's OPTEMPO will help in this area, he said, noting that the reorganized fleet structure and changes in fleet training schedules emphasize fewer at-sea periods and could reduce underway time by as much as six weeks or more a year.

Unmarried sailors are not forgotten in the quality-of-life improvement program. Pierside parking, better laundry facilities, extra storage space, and more telephones, both aboard ships and in barracks, are among the improved amenities now available to unmarried personnel, according to Marsh.

### Corps Issues

The Marine Corps has developed its own quality-of-life strategy—which is based in part on a two-year study conducted by Elyse W. Kerce that, says Christmas, "identified some issues that clearly need addressing." The study showed "overall job satisfaction, but ... concerns in some areas," Christmas said. Approximately 49 percent of Marines are lance corporals or below; coincidentally, 49 percent of all Marines also are single and, not surprisingly, have their own unique perspective of what constitutes an acceptable quality of life. More than 40 percent of Marines surveyed felt that something was lacking, in one way or another, in their current quality of life. They expressed specific interest in high-quality fitness centers, barracks that are comfortable, private, and attractive, places where they can socialize with significant others, and facilities where they can read or listen to music.

Married Marines with families have different perspectives and interests. According to Christmas, married Marines want comfortable housing—base housing, preferably, because base housing means better security. They also want better



Author Kastre writes that pay, benefits, and housing are "key determinants" of the nation's ability to retain the quality of personnel needed in an all-volunteer force. Shown here is a Marine family—Cpl. Michael Allen and his wife, Cindy, playing with their two sons—in a park at Marine Corps Air Station, Yuma, Ariz.

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child-care services and assurance that, when they are deployed, help will be available if their family members encounter problems. These are no small matters, if only because, on any given day, according to Christmas, the Corps has 25,000 Marines deployed.

Responding to the quality-of-life concerns that have been raised, USMC Commandant Gen. Charles C. Krulak appointed a management board that drafted a strategic plan called "Marine 2001 Quality of Life." The plan covers everything from family support, housing, and education to MWR and other quality-of-life issues. The Marine approach is somewhat different but in many ways mirrors the efforts being made by the Navy.

Steps to improve quality of life for today's Marines are being taken "across the board," according to Christmas. Housing and child-care issues are being addressed. New fit-

Navy Department leaders have declared that, except in times of crisis, overseas deployments will not be permitted to adversely impact Navy/Marine Corps quality of life. Shown here are signs displayed pierside at the Norfolk naval base by the families of crewmen of the patrol coastal ship USS Typhoon returning home after a four-month deployment to the Mediterranean.

ness centers are taking shape. New barracks are being built and old ones renovated; the newly refurbished quarters feature reading rooms and social lounges. They also are equipped with "resource areas" complete with computer systems. A contract has been awarded to provide single Marines with barracks telephone service. Every USMC installation has established a quality-of-life council. And personal communications have improved dramatically—e-mail now can be sent directly to the commandant.

"Our Marines must understand that our commandant and his staff ... know that what makes the Marine Corps go is lance corporal ingenuity and PFC power," says Christmas. And he emphasizes that the Marines won't forget their retired members: "Today's Corps is built on their legacy," he says.

### An Assessment of Alternatives

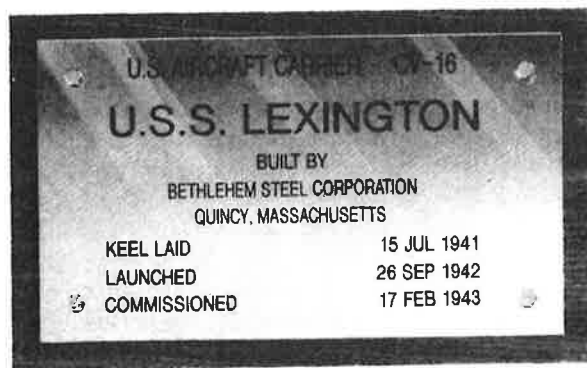
The Department of Defense also is taking aggressive measures DOD-wide to improve the quality of life for the overall military community. Among recent Pentagon initiatives, according to Becraft, are the establishment of goals and criteria for a broad range of community support programs. This ensures that, although each service is developing its own standards, those standards are measured against DOD's overall guidelines. Becraft's office also is working to establish improved accountability for quality-of-life funding, and has funded an Internet system to facilitate information-sharing among all the services.

Several programs also are being developed to address youth issues. Becraft points out that there now are more opportunities for women both in the military and in the civilian workplace; the dual-income family has become increasingly important to the economic survival of many families and, with husband and wife both working, there is an even greater need for the services to address child care, housing, youth programs, and similar issues.

The broad range of issues requiring attention presents a formidable challenge to the Navy and Marine Corps, particularly in an era of shrinking defense budgets. But, as both Marsh and Christmas note, the key is first to make a thorough assessment of what is needed and then to balance the funding resources available for quality-of-life programs against those required for essential military hardware and supplies. And, in cases where competing requirements cannot be balanced, to look at alternative approaches—such as the privatization of housing.

"We often think that buying the best hardware ensures readiness, but readiness extends beyond such things as floating assets," says Sydney Hickey, associate director of government relations for the National Military Family Association. "After all," he notes, "the best military equipment and systems in the world are only as good as the people who make them work."

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