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SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT
OF
LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL A. ROCCO
DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR MANPOWER & RESERVE AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL
OF THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
CONCERNING
DOPMA AND OFFICER PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
ON
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Lieutenant General Michael A. Rocco
Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs,
Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps



Lieutenant General Rocco received his Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration from St. Johns University in New York and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in May 1983. After graduating from The Basic School in February 1984, he was meritoriously augmented and he reported to Naval Aviation Training Command, Pensacola, Florida, for flight training. Upon designation as a Naval Aviator in February 1986, Lieutenant General Rocco was assigned to HMLA-367 as an AH-1J pilot where he served in the Logistics Department.

He deployed to Okinawa, Japan, and was promoted to Captain in May 1988. He subsequently served in a variety of billets to include Training Officer, Flight Officer, NATOPS Officer, and Weapons and Tactics Instructor for Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 367 (HMLA).

In August 1990, HMLA-367 deployed to Saudi Arabia in support of Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm. Lieutenant General Rocco was assigned as a Flight Leader and led over 40 combat missions. Upon his return in March 1991, he was assigned as the Director of Safety and Standardization for HMLA-367.

In August 1992, Lieutenant General Rocco reported to Amphibious Warfare School (AWS) in Quantico, Virginia. While at AWS, he received the Marine Corps Aviation Association Lieutenant Colonel Robert J. Johnson Award, given to the outstanding aviation student. Upon graduation from AWS in May 1993, Lieutenant General Rocco reported to Fleet Marine Forces Europe for further assignment to the Royal Marine Exchange Program in Yeovilton, England. He deployed twice to Bardufoss, Norway, and made numerous deployments throughout Europe with the Royal Marines. Upon completion of the exchange tour, he was selected to attend the Naval Command and Staff Course at the Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, where he received a Master of Arts Degree in National Policy and Strategic Studies.

Graduating from the Naval War College in May 1996, Lieutenant General Rocco received orders to 3d Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW) and was assigned to HMLA-369. In February 1997, Lieutenant General Rocco was assigned as the Operations Officer of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 164 (HMM) (Reinforced) and sailed with the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU(SOC)) in August 1997.

Once back from deployment, Lieutenant General Rocco assumed the post of Executive Officer of HMLA-369. In February 1999, he assumed the post of Executive Officer of Marine Helicopter Training Squadron 303 (HMT). Later that same year, he was assigned to Headquarters 3d MAW, where he served as Staff Secretary for the Commanding General of 3d MAW. In June 2000, Lieutenant General Rocco was assigned as the Executive Officer of Marine Aircraft Group 39 (MAG). In March 2001, Lieutenant General Rocco assumed Command of HMLA-369 and after a successful deployment to Okinawa in support of the Unit Deployment Program, he relinquished command of the Gunfighters in January 2003.

In February 2003, he deployed with MAG-39 Headquarters in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Upon returning from OIF, he attended the Industrial College of the Armed Forces in Washington, D.C., and received a Master of Science Degree in National Resource Strategy. In June 2004, he was assigned to the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. In January 2007, he was transferred

back to 3d MAW for refresher training and served as the Commanding Officer, MAG-39 from June 2007 to June 2009.

In August 2009, he was promoted to Brigadier General and served as the Deputy Director, J-3, U.S. European Command, Patch Barracks, Stuttgart, Germany, until July 2011. Lieutenant General Rocco then served as the Director, Strategies and Plans Division, Plans, Policies, and Operations Directorate (PP&O), Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps in Washington, D.C. from July 2011 until June 2014. In June 2014, Lieutenant General Rocco assumed command of the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing, and remained in command until July 2016. From August to December 2016, he served as the Director, Manpower Plans and Policy Division, and from January to August of 2017, he served as the Director, Manpower Management Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps. In August of 2017, Lieutenant General Rocco was promoted to his current rank and assumed the duties of his current position as the Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.

His personal decorations include the Defense Superior Service Medal with Gold Star, Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross with "V", Meritorious Service Medal, Air Medal with "V", Air Medal with numeral 2, Navy Commendation Medal, and Navy Achievement Medal with Gold Star.

He is married to Susan Rocco and they have three children, Michael, Matthew, and Mara.

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Tillis, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and distinguished Members of this subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss our officer personnel management and the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA).

YOUR MARINES

Since our founding in 1775, Marines have answered our Nation's call, faithfully serving the American people and maintaining a standard of military excellence. Your Marine Corps is, and will continue to be, our Nation's expeditionary force in readiness. We are ready to rapidly respond to crises around the Globe as a highly lethal combat or effective humanitarian force to ensure the continued security of the American people and to protect the interests that underpin our Nation. Marines will be *always faithful* to the trust which the American people have vested in them.

Your Marines are the foundation of the Marine Corps. They are recruited, trained, retained, and educated to wear the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor with pride, and to fight and win our Nation's battles. They are smart, resilient, fit, disciplined, and motivated by a unique, unwavering esprit de corps. They are dedicated to upholding the honor, courage, and commitment of the generations of Marines before them, and of our Corps.

Recruiting

Recruiting high quality youth and retaining those whose past service and future potential continue to make the Corps stronger are our highest priorities. The transformation of Marines begins with entry-level training, whether it is recruit training, Officer Candidate School, or the United States Naval Academy, and continues throughout a Marine's career. Today, through the hard work and diligence of our recruiting force we continue to identify high quality men and

women of character who desire to take up our challenge to serve this great nation as United States Marines.

All recruiting efforts for the Marine Corps (officer, enlisted, regular, reserve, and prior-service) fall under the purview of the Marine Corps Recruiting Command. Operationally, this provides us with tremendous flexibility and unity of command, facilitating efforts to meet accession requirements. The Marine Corps applies, evaluates, and refines proven, time-tested officer and enlisted recruiting policies and procedures that are reflected in the high mental, moral, and physical standards of our applicants, such as SAT, ACT, and ASVAB testing; pre-enlistment physical screening and fitness tests; and security background checks and pre-enlistment screening.

Last fiscal year, we successfully achieved all enlisted and officer recruiting goals for both the Active and Reserve Components. This year, we again expect to achieve our annual recruiting ‘shipping’ mission (i.e. new accessions sent to recruit training and Officer Candidates School) and quality goals. Moreover, our quality is historically high. The Department of Defense requires 90 percent of enlistees to have a high school diploma or equivalent (Education Tier 1), and 60 percent of enlistees to be in Mental Group I-III A (assessed mental aptitude). Last year, the Marine Corps achieved 99.9 percent of Tier 1 and 72.3 percent of Mental Group I-III A; we expect to be at or near these levels for FY18. We did not assess any applicants in Mental Group IV in FY17 and do not expect any in FY18.

Retention

As the Marine Corps manages its force, and increases its end strength to 186,000, the challenge to keep high-quality Marines in the service in a competitive civilian job market will

continue. This is accomplished through a competitive career designation process for officers that has proven very effective. We expect to meet our overall retention goal again for FY18.

Warfare has grown increasingly technical, so we need officers who are skilled and capable of operating effectively in highly technical areas, e.g. cyber, that are prevalent in all aspects of modern warfare. However, the most important qualities will remain leadership, performance, and the collective experiences – experiences that often take time – that imbue the officer with the knowledge and understanding needed to succeed in the myriad roles in which the officer will be called on to lead the men and women who serve our Nation in arduous conditions and austere environments.

A very real way to improve retention of officers with the leadership, skills, and experience for the current and future fight is to maintain and fund bonuses and incentive pays. We will increasingly depend on these incentives in the future in order to retain officers and enlisted Marines in critical skills or in high-demand/low-density occupations. We recently reinstated the Aviation Bonus for specific aviation communities experiencing shortfalls.

Continuing resolutions negatively impact our ability to use bonuses and incentive pays, capping them at previous fiscal year levels. This has affected our retention of aviators and other key skill sets because retention decision points are not made at the same rate during the fiscal year – they ebb and flow over the course of the year. To effectively employ these tools requires predictable funding streams. Because of continuing resolutions we have repeatedly been forced to delay payment of re-enlistment bonuses due to lack of funding. As a result we have failed to retain key officers and other critically skilled Marines.

DOPMA

Enacted in 1980, DOPMA has proven to be a predictable and equitable way to manage the appointment, promotion, separation, and retirement of our officers. It has given us the tools to manage a large force, maintain healthy personnel grade pyramids, and build Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) officers with broad and deep skills. DOPMA has allowed us to create and maintain adequate promotion/retention flow within our officer corps. Our current system is merit-based (board selected) and promotes the best, most fully qualified officers. This system works exceptionally well for us because our inventory is created and maintained directly based upon structure (billet) requirements. The flexibility of the system allows the Marine Corps to design the ideal balance within the officer corps to respond to future requirements, stabilize the force, drawdown when required by Congress, and accurately program and budget the service military personnel account.

Over the decades as requirements have changed due to the changing strategic environment, DOPMA has evolved and been improved to allow us to properly manage our officers. Recent early retirement, voluntary separation, and time in grade waiver authorities have proven effective in allowing us to execute our recent drawdown and continue to shape the force. We thank Congress for these authorities and the myriad of other force shaping tools it has given us.

OFFICER MANAGEMENT REFORM

We are always assessing ways to create more flexibility to recruit and retain the officers we need to enhance our readiness and lethality. Increasingly, war fighting is becoming more sophisticated, technical, and complex. Cyber operations, information and electronic warfare, enhanced command and control, intelligence, engineering, civil-military operations, manned-

unmanned teaming, robotics, and the leveraging of artificial intelligence are examples of critical skills we will need for the future fight. Creating incentives through continued reform will help us now and in the future.

Creating separate competitive categories for certain officer occupations is also being evaluated. We recently created a separate competitive category for our financial managers and will conduct detailed analysis to determine its effectiveness and the feasibility to implement for additional occupational fields.

Non-command career tracks are also being discussed. We are assessing whether this would result in adverse second- and third-order impacts for the Marine Corps. Any such tool must be implemented equitably; it is not something that should be offered to some, but not similarly-situated others. In addition, we must always remain vigilant about maintaining a high-quality pool of officers to consider for promotion. In some respects, our current ability to continue officers who are twice passed for promotion achieves the intent of the non-command career track, enabling officers with needed leadership and skills to remain in service, albeit at the same grade.

However, the Marine Corps depends on our foundational schools, training, and broadening tours within the MAGTF to increase skills and infuse our ethos and warrior culture. Although we have some occupational fields that we contract specifically for (e.g. lawyers, aviators) or manage and promote separately (e.g. financial managers), Marines in these occupational fields all go through the same initial training as the rest of the officer Corps to earn the title Marine. Any guidance to bypass these schools, training, or MAGTF broadening would be a significant change in Marine Corps officer management philosophy and should be approached carefully.

We look forward to working with the Department on the DOPMA study required by the FY18 NDAA. We believe it will help guide future changes to how we manage our officers and better enable us to manage our exceptional talent.

CONCLUSION

The goal of officer management – and all force management – must be to create, maintain, and improve lethality and combat readiness. DOPMA has proven effective at doing so, but we are open to ways to improve it. The Marine Corps supports creating a highly flexible and agile statutory and policy framework for officer development and utilization. We welcome the opportunity to study and evaluate specific policies being proposed, including their impact on our current MAGTF construct. In doing so, making well-informed decisions based on rigorous analysis to ensure lethality, combat readiness, fulfilling operational assignments, and the overall needs of each Service are paramount.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present this testimony.