

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION
UNTIL RELEASED BY
THE HOUSE ARMED
SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**STATEMENT OF
GENERAL MICHAEL W. HAGEE
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

June 27, 2006

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Introduction

Chairman Hunter, Congressman Skelton, distinguished members of the Committee; it is my honor to report to you on our progress in meeting the plan to reset your Marine Corps. My message today is the same message I have delivered in hearings and office calls for the past three years. The message is that the toll taken by this long war on terror—the sustained combat operations at a high operational tempo in harsh environments—requires a significant effort to maintain the Marine Corps' role as the Nation's premier expeditionary combat force in readiness. Like all wars, this war is costly, both in human terms and in the need for reliable, modern equipment. This statement outlines the challenges we share in sustaining the caliber of service the Nation expects from its Corps of Marines. Readiness has been the enduring hallmark of the Marine Corps, and even if this long war ended today, we would require significant fiscal support to "reset the force." It is through the continued efforts of the Congress that our Corps remains strong as our forces continue the mission at hand. Our Marines and their families stand ready to address future missions and contingencies, and we are striving to maintain our future warfighting readiness.

Current Operations

The exigencies of continuing combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have placed rigorous demands on both our Marines and their equipment. Our high operational tempo (just over 1:1, approximately seven months deployed/seven months at home) is primarily felt in our tactical units—infantry battalions, rotary-wing aviation squadrons, and other high demand capabilities. With twenty-six percent of our total operating forces and eighteen percent of the total active force currently deployed, Marine operating forces are either deployed, have recently returned from deployment, or are preparing to deploy. Although many of our units have deployed as many as three times in this war, normal rotations within these units typically translate to a relatively small percentage of personnel actually making a third deployment to the theater. We are also watching very closely for signs that would indicate the force is overly stressed. Post deployment mental health screenings, suicides, domestic violence, and divorce rates are all monitored and briefed to me regularly. Additionally, commanders and

noncommissioned officers at every level of command are charged to monitor these indications closely and to stay engaged on these issues.

Our Marines continue to prove themselves to be tough and selflessly dedicated to their mission, but extended combat operations have severely tested our materiel. While the vast majority of our equipment has passed the test of sustained combat operations, it has been subjected to a lifetime's worth of wear stemming from vehicle mileage, operating hours, and harsh environmental conditions—at up to seven times the planned rate on often already aged equipment. This creates challenges as approximately thirty percent of all Marine Corps ground equipment, and nearly thirty-five percent of our active duty aviation squadrons are currently engaged overseas. Most of this equipment is not rotating out of theater at the conclusion of each force rotation, but is sustaining continuous use at a rate that far exceeds utilization estimates.

As our priority for equipment is always to support the Marines serving in harm's way, we have drawn additional equipment from the Maritime Prepositioning Ships, prepositioned stores from the Norway caves, as well as retaining the equipment in theater from units that are rotating back to the United States. The results of these efforts have been outstanding—the average mission capable rates of our deployed forces' ground equipment remain above ninety-five percent... but there is a price.

The cost of this success is a decrease in non-deployed unit readiness and an increase in maintenance hours per operating time. Equipment across the Marine Corps is continuously cross-leveled and redistributed to ensure that units preparing to deploy have sufficient equipment available to conduct our stringent pre-deployment training programs. The timely delivery of replacement equipment is crucial to sustaining the high readiness rates for the Marines in theater, as well as improving the rates for the forces here at home. While this has been funded by the Congress, much of this equipment is still many months from delivery.

The harsh environments of Iraq and Afghanistan have highlighted the limitations of our aging fleet of aircraft. In order to successfully support our Marines, sister services, and coalition partners on the ground, our aircraft have been flying at two to three times their designed utilization rates, as depicted in Figure 1. Despite this unprecedented utilization, the yeoman efforts of our maintenance personnel have sustained our aviation mission capable rates for deployed forces at eighty-three percent over the past twelve months.

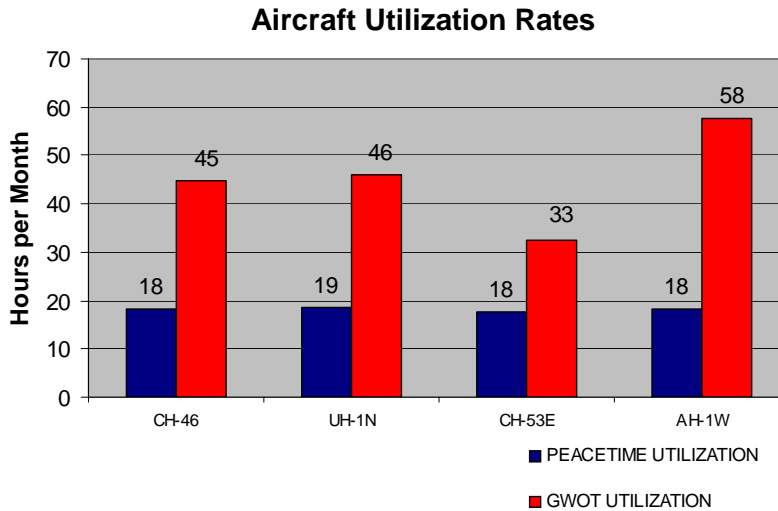


Figure 1

The corresponding aviation mission capable rates for our units in garrison, who have either recently returned from deployment, or are preparing to deploy again, have averaged seventy-five percent over the past 12 months. In order to improve our aircraft readiness rate, we have created a limited aircraft depot maintenance capability in theater. Maintaining the readiness of our aviation assets presents a considerable challenge and constant demand for maintenance.

The extreme temperatures, high altitudes, and the erosive desert environment have in themselves created a unique set of maintenance challenges for Marine Aviation. We have mitigated aircraft degradation as much as possible through specific aircraft modifications, proactive inspections, and corrective maintenance. While these efforts have successfully bolstered aircraft reliability, sustainability, and survivability, additional requirements for depot level maintenance on airframes, engines, weapons, and support equipment will continue well after the end of hostilities.

Resetting Marine Aviation means not merely repairing and replacing damaged and destroyed aircraft, but getting better aircraft in the field sooner. As there are few hot production lines for most of our current fleet of aircraft, near-term inventory shortfalls require accelerated or increased procurement of the MV-22, the UH-1Y, the AH-1Z, and the KC-130J. Attrition in our heavy-lift CH-53E fleet requires a longer-term solution—the CH-53K. The capability enhancements afforded by these aircraft and the CH-53K are essential to our continued effectiveness—both in this conflict and future contingencies. Resetting our full aviation capability will also require significant funding for airframe damage repair, restoration, and upgrade of aircraft to replace destroyed airframes, Pioneer unmanned aerial vehicle component

recovery, air traffic control equipment refurbishment, targeting pod replacement, and numerous other efforts to restore capability lost in Global War on Terror (GWOT) operations.

Ground Equipment

The Marine Corps is executing a number of operational missions that are inherently ground equipment intensive. Stability and Support Operations (SASO), Counter-Insurgency (COIN), Civil Military Operations, and Foreign Military Training all require a greater quantity of equipment than our programmed levels for traditional combat operations. In order to adapt to these new mission requirements, we have revised the Equipment Density List, increasing the

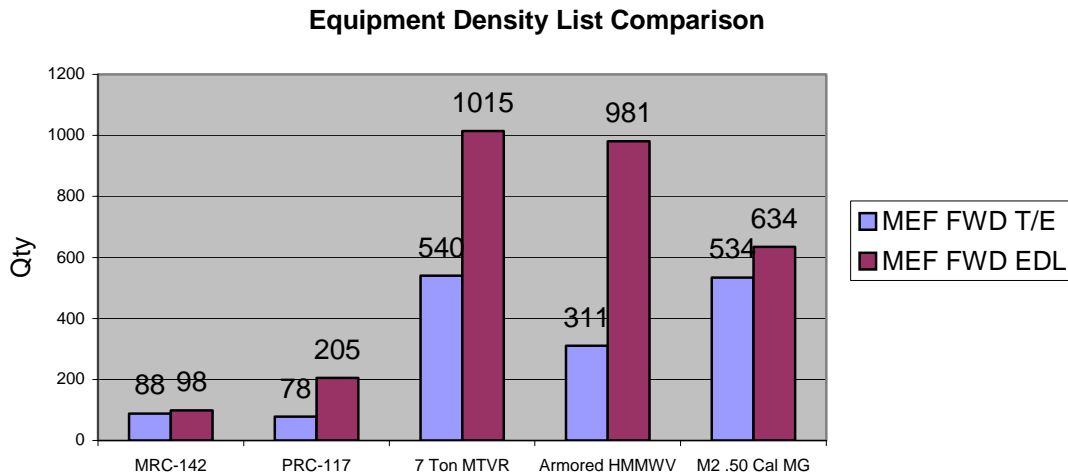


Figure 2

quantity of equipment issued to Marine units deploying into the CENTCOM Area of Operations. A comparison (excerpt) of the pre-war table of equipment with the revised Equipment Density List appears in Figure 2.

In addition, the preponderance of the Marine Corps’ war effort is in the western Iraqi province of Al Anbar. This province is approximately 80,000 square miles—an area roughly the equivalent of the state of Utah, with over a million people located in cities, towns, and vast spaces in the desert and along foreign borders. Our forward operating bases are not in close proximity to each other; the large distances between forward operating bases require additional vehicles, communications capabilities, and crew served weapons over and above the standard unit Equipment Density List.

The increased ground equipment requirement when coupled with high utilization rates (see Figure 3.), results in a Corps-wide degradation of equipment.

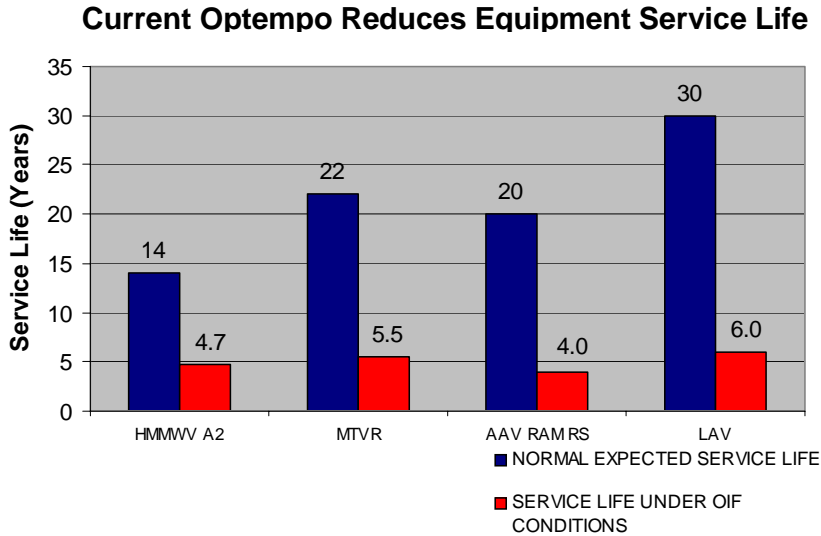


Figure 3

Strategic Materiel and Positioning Programs

Due to the priority of sustaining the readiness of our forward deployed forces, the equipment readiness of our strategic prepositioning programs has eroded. Equipment stores from the Marine Corps’ two prepositioning programs (the Maritime Prepositioning Force and Marine Corps Prepositioning Program – Norway) have been utilized to conduct the Global War on Terror. Our in-stores equipment stocks have also been depleted in support of our force rotation in Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedoms. In-stores material is critical to the readiness of our operating forces and particularly important to the readiness of our Reserve component.

By fencing off a portion of our Maritime Prepositioning Ship Squadrons, we have maintained a strategic response capability, although at a reduced rate. Maritime Prepositioning Ship Squadron 2 downloaded equipment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and will complete its reconstitution during its scheduled maintenance period of February 2008 through February 2009. Additionally, funding to replenish the Marine Prepositioning Program-Norway was reflected in the FY 2006 Supplemental funding request; and we will reconstitute this program by FY 2010, contingent on equipment delivery schedules and operational commitments.

Costs and Resourcing of Resetting the Force

We conduct a comprehensive review of our “reset” costs each year. We are deeply appreciative of Congressional help in this area. With the passage of the most recent

supplemental appropriation, we have received \$5.1 billion toward our total reset requirement. Even with an annual “top line” of \$18.2B (FY 2007 President’s Budget), supplemental funding will continue to be required unless there is a significant increase (almost double) in our Total Obligation Authority.

While funding current GWOT operations is our highest priority, any reduction in supplementals without an offsetting increase in our “top-line,” would result in an unacceptable degradation of our investment and modernization accounts. Reduction in these accounts would significantly affect the quality of life of our Marines and impact our ability to provide a naval expeditionary presence, capable of relentlessly pursuing terrorist organizations and projecting sustainable forces ashore to conduct the full spectrum of operations—from humanitarian assistance to major combat operations.

Conclusion

Our Marines serving in combat overseas are highly motivated volunteers who continue to perform heroically under harsh conditions. They endure hardship and sacrifice far from the familiarity of home and the comfort of friends and family. We will continue to inspire, train, and equip them for success. Simultaneously maintaining our readiness, resetting the force during an extended war, and modernizing and transforming to prepare for the challenges of the future requires the sustained support of the American people and the Congress. With it, your Marines will enter the coming battles as the well-equipped, well-trained fighting force you have come to expect. With it, your Marines will remain ready, relevant, and capable, able to flexibly respond to every crisis.