



**DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**  
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS  
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WASHINGTON, DC 20350-3000

IN REPLY REFER TO:  
CMC-MP  
**16 AUG 2004**

WHITE LETTER NO. 03-04

From: Commandant of the Marine Corps  
To: All General Officers  
All Commanding Officers  
All Officers in Charge

Subj: III MARINE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE/MARINE CORPS BASES JAPAN  
(III MED/MCBJ) ASSIGNMENT POLICY

Encl: (1) Campaign Plan to Implement III MEF/MCBJ Assignment  
Policy Change

1. The enclosure outlines my intent for the implementation of the new III MEF/MCBJ assignment policy. This policy will provide increased combat effectiveness, stability and continuity to the Pacific region and specifically III MEF/MCBJ.

2. In order to ensure success of this policy, it is imperative that commanders at all levels widely disseminate accurate information to all personnel.

3. Finally, as we phase-in this policy, continuous evaluation of all support requirements must occur to ensure we do not overburden the infrastructure on Okinawa or Iwakuni. Marines and their families should expect they will be taken care of, whether they accept a 36-month accompanied tour or a 24-month unaccompanied tour.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. W. Hagee".

M. W. Hagee

CAMPAIGN PLAN TO IMPLEMENT III MEF/MCBJ ASSIGNMENT POLICY CHANGE

Ref: (a) MCO P1300.8R  
(b) DoDI 1315.7  
(c) CG III MEF ltr of 20 February 2003  
(d) ALMAR 138/98

Task Organization:

Headquarters, United States Marine Corps (M&RA)  
Headquarters, United States Marine Corps (PA)  
Headquarters, United States Marine Corps (I&L)  
Headquarters, United States Marine Corps (HS)  
Headquarters, United States Marine Corps (P&R)  
Headquarters, United States Marine Corps (PP&O)  
Headquarters, United States Marine Corps (AVN)

1. SITUATION

a. General. The Commandant of the Marine Corps has changed the assignment policy regarding tour lengths for Marines assigned to III Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) or Marine Corps Bases Japan (MCBJ) to 36-month tours with family members or 24-month tours without families. As reflected in reference (a), policy for assignments to Okinawa and Iwakuni, Japan heretofore stood apart from the other Services and utilized a shorter 12-month dependent-restricted tour option normally associated with hardship duty locations. Per reference (b), in 1987 DoD granted the Marine Corps an exception to policy that allowed for the shorter assignment option to manage operational tempo and improve quality of life for Marines and their families. At that time, Okinawa was less developed and personnel faced isolation and hardships due to a limited support infrastructure. Over the past 16 years, however, living conditions in Okinawa and both inter- and intra-theater travel opportunities have dramatically improved. Furthermore, the Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) provided to members on accompanied tours has proven ample compensation for the additional financial burdens incurred by living overseas. By reference (c), in February 2003, the CG, III MEF called for a revalidation of current assignment practices to Okinawa and Iwakuni. Citing an unacceptably high annual turnover rate created by 12-month assignments, he stressed the importance of increasing tour lengths for greater operational stability, continuity, and regional expertise. In response, the DC M&RA formed a working group to explore new assignment options. In October 2003, the CG III MEF raised the issue for discussion at an Executive Off-Site and made the case for an immediate assignment policy change. As a result, CMC

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approved the proposal to change the tour length for all Marines going to III MEF and MCBJ back to the DoD standard for overseas assignments.

b. Assumption. The greatest potential challenge regarding a policy change lengthening unaccompanied III MEF/MCBJ tours appears to be infrastructure support. It is assumed that the support infrastructure in Japan will grow to support the new policy.

2. MISSION. Commencing with permanent change of station orders executed in FY04, the Marine Corps expands its 36-month accompanied tour opportunities for Japan to the maximum extent locally supportable and, as events allow, transitions from 12-month to 24-month tours for all unaccompanied personnel.

### 3. EXECUTION

#### a. Commandant's Intent and Concept of Operations

(1) Commandant's Intent. As one of three major war-fighting commands, we must ensure that III MEF has the required resources and personnel stability to respond quickly to any Pacific contingency. In order to achieve the necessary personnel stability and continuity, we have established a 36/24-month Japanese assignment policy. To commence in FY04, we will transition to the 36/24-month assignment policy for Japan in a deliberate and phased manner. The transition will be event driven and based on the ability of infrastructure to properly care for our Marines and families.

(2) Concept of Operations. During FY04, the Marine Corps will begin to increase the number of Marines assigned to 36-month accompanied tours to III MEF/MCBJ as the infrastructure of Okinawa and Iwakuni supports. In addition, we will systematically transition to 24-month unaccompanied tours for all others within infrastructure capabilities in Okinawa and Iwakuni. Given the relatively limited size and capacity of Iwakuni, their assignment policy and implementation plan phases will be treated independent of Okinawa. The policy change in each respective location will occur in three phases as follows:

(a) Phase I, Implementation (15 April 2004). All senior leaders assigned to Okinawa in the grades of colonel, lieutenant colonel, sergeant major, master gunnery sergeant, first sergeant, and master sergeant will accept either 36-month accompanied orders, or 24-month unaccompanied orders for all others. Assignment of Marines approaching service limits or EAS

will be handled on a case-by-case basis. Additionally, first term privates, privates first class, lance corporals and corporals, who do not have dependents, will begin executing 24-month unaccompanied orders.

(b) Phase II, Expansion (15 April 2005). In Phase II, all members of the following grades will accept either 36-month accompanied orders, or 24-month unaccompanied orders for all others:

- Private, private first class, lance corporal, and corporal
- Second lieutenant, first lieutenant, warrant officer, chief warrant officer, chief warrant officer three, chief warrant officer four and chief warrant officer five.

The assignment policy for all senior leaders and first term privates, privates first class, lance corporals and corporals, who do not have dependents, will continue per Phase I. The assignment policy for sergeants, staff sergeants, gunnery sergeants, captains and majors will remain unchanged.

(c) Phase III, Sustainment (Event Driven). All Marines, regardless of grades will be given either 36-month accompanied or 24-month unaccompanied all others orders. For this phase to occur, all issues related to expanding the number of teachers, doctors, housing and other support must be in place. In order to ensure the infrastructure is capable of absorbing the influx of accompanied personnel, the CG, III MEF will convene a working group that will work in conjunction with the DC M&RA. The III MEF/MCBJ Working Group will perform an in-depth study of its infrastructural capability to absorb projected increases in family members across the island, keeping the DC M&RA updated as to their findings. Once their study is complete, and the needed infrastructure is in place, they will make the recommendation to the DC M&RA to proceed to Phase III.

(3) 12-Month Unaccompanied Orders. The DC M&RA will continue to exercise the right to issue 12-month unaccompanied orders so long as MCBJ/III MEF infrastructure and support capabilities fail to accommodate total implementation of this campaign plan. Registered Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) Marines who may not qualify for overseas service at either location will be eligible for 12-month unaccompanied tours.

(4) Orders for Marines with Family members. Before orders are issued to any Marine with family members, CG, III MEF will use a new area clearance checklist (which will be collaboratively developed by DC M&RA and CG III MEF/MCBJ) to ensure that infrastructure is available for each Marine and family. The CG, III MEF will inform M&RA that they can in fact support the Marine and family members for each given set of orders. Only at this point will the DC M&RA approve and issue such orders.

b. Tasks

(1) DC M&RA

(a) Coordinate staff efforts to execute this campaign plan. Act as the final authority for approval of Phases I, II, and III, as per MCBJ/III MEF recommendations.

(b) Issue orders to Marines in accordance with the phases outlined in this plan.

(c) Assess the impact of this policy change on family quality of life and job satisfaction among those assigned to III MEF/MCBJ.

(d) Publish a directive announcing the policy change, and modify MCO P1300.8R as required.

(f) Based on the success of full policy implementation in Phase III, request modification of reference (b).

(g) Adjust the PCS plan, providing costs for FY04 and beyond to the DC P&R by 30 September 2004.

(h) In coordination with III MEF/MCBJ, MP will develop a new overseas screening checklist for III MEF/MCBJ. This will include, but is not limited to the following:

- 1 Availability of school seats for family members
- 2 Availability of medical and dental care
- 3 Availability of appropriate housing
- 4 Availability of adequate day care

(2) CG III MEF

(a) Act as lead agent for the III MEF/MCBJ Working Group, which will consist of representation from: MCBJ and appropriate agencies within HQMC (MP, MM, MR, PP&O, I&L, HS, P&R and AVN). The purpose of this group is to conduct an in-depth analysis of current and future capability of III MEFs/MCBJs infrastructure to support each phase of the campaign plan. This group will advise the DC M&RA as to when infrastructure will allow for progression to Phase III.

(b) Submit monthly reports to CMC (MPO-40) as to the availability of vital supporting infrastructure. This report will contain, at a minimum, utilization/availability percentages for housing, childcare, medical/dental and school student capacity. Final development of information contained in this report will be coordinated with CMC (MPO-40).

(3) DIR PA. Develop and execute internal and external public affairs plans and information tools to support a smooth implementation of this policy change.

(4) DC I&L. With the assistance of MCBJ, identify the overall supporting establishment and infrastructure requirements, develop a support plan, and expand base support and infrastructure where needed in both Okinawa and Iwakuni to implement this campaign plan.

(5) DIR HS. Identify the overall requirements and implement a support plan to expand health care in both Okinawa and Iwakuni commensurate with the increase in accompanied tours.

(6) DC P&R. Develop a comprehensive cost estimate, program, and budget to support this policy change.

(7) DC PP&O. Coordinate with the Government of Japan and the Okinawa Prefecture Government in order to ensure positive host nation support.

c. Coordinating Instructions. Use every opportunity to educate Marines and their families on this policy, the benefits of longer tours, and encourage Marines with dependents to seek accompanied tours.

4. ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS. DC M&RA will consolidate, prioritize, and submit all requirements for additional funding.

5. COMMAND AND SIGNAL. DC M&RA is designated as the HQMC lead on executing this policy change. An integrated effort is required in order to make this policy change a success.

  
M. W. Hagee