



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
2 NAVY ANNEX
WASHINGTON, DC 20380-1775

IN REPLY REFER TO:

CMC-MP
6 Dec 99

WHITE LETTER NO. 05-99

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

Subj: RETENTION

1. As we enter the next century, preparing to sustain the Marine Corps as the nation's force of choice, there is one fundamental element of success: our Marines. Marines remain the underpinning of our Corps and the manifestation of a force in readiness. Maintaining that readiness has become ever more challenging over the past ten years with reductions in end strength and increased deployment tempo.
2. Our current end strength authorization does not adequately support the structure requirements and demands on our force. I am personally resolved to rectify this problem; one that cannot be solved overnight. In the meantime, all of us need to focus our attention on retaining the quality force we have today. This is a responsibility all leaders share, a responsibility that requires a personal touch as we continue to recruit, train, assign, and retain the right Marines. The Corps is held in the highest esteem for the enormous success of our recruiters, our drill instructors, and your retention efforts. No organization is more respected for its ability to attract and retain the most highly talented citizens to defend our nation.
3. Our success to date, however, does not come without concerns. Those concerns are with enlisted and officer retention and could become significant if we don't aggressively apply our leadership to the issue. We need to retain more Marines who are currently leaving our Corps voluntarily. We need them to lead us into the future and help reduce some of the demands on our recruiting force. Furthermore, as I indicated in my Commandant's Guidance, we separate the equivalent of two infantry regiments of Marines every year for non-EAS reasons. This is one area that bears particular attention. Without compromising our standards we must ensure that Marines, who make mistakes, are not relegated to a self-fulfilling, slippery slope of administrative and non-judicial actions that eventually lead to separation, when they may otherwise have the potential for success in our Corps. We have all made mistakes, and many of us can cite efforts by our leaders to facilitate our recovery as productive Marines. Those commitments allowed us to remain and contribute as members of our elite Corps.
4. Our Corps and our Marines need your commitment and personal involvement in all of our enlisted and officer retention efforts. The following points highlight the responsibilities each of us must proactively embrace:
 - a. Attempt to lower non-EAS attrition without compromising our values and standards.
 - b. Know who is up for reenlistment among your first-term Marines and get personally involved with attaining our first term alignment plan goals by keeping our most talented, young leaders.

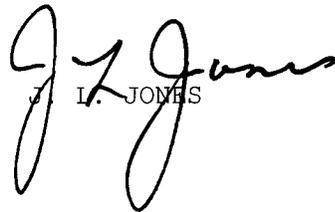
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c. Stay in touch and get involved with reenlistment of your enlisted career force Marines, particularly those at the second and third reenlistment points. We cannot assume they will reenlist of their own volition. We must fight to keep our best Marines throughout their span of service.

d. Actively encourage your young officers to apply for augmentation. Augmentation under the "All Reserve Commissions Mandate" will determine our future career officer leadership. We need to fight to keep those with the initiative and aggressiveness to lead our Corps.

e. Become advocates for the officer Supplementary MOS (SMOS) program. Get involved with helping your officers choose and apply for a SMOS. Support those officers serving in their SMOS to garner the rewarding experience of their broadened professional development.

5. Making Marines and winning battles remains our nation's charge to the Marine Corps. We depend on the Marines we lead today to sustain our expeditionary force in readiness tomorrow. Each of us must continue to earn the respect, trust, and confidence of our Marines by demonstrating that personal leadership touch which goes to the heart of caring for our Marines.


J. I. JONES