

Executive Summary

Quality of Life

In January 2000 the Naval Research Advisory Committee (NRAC) was tasked by the Honorable H. Lee Buchanan, Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Research, Development and Acquisition) [ASN(RD&A)] to examine Quality of Life (QoL) issues for Sailors and Marines, anticipate what those issues will be for the Navy and Marine Corps of the twenty-first century, and forecast the appropriate Department of the Navy (DON) responses to the challenges. The tasking included a review of historical and current QOL areas identified by the DON and the current institutional response to them, including the problem areas of housing/shipboard life, standard of living, and job performance challenges, and assess whether the current response will address the changing needs. The panel was asked to identify the QOL issues that arise as population changes occur and the concomitant employment issues that result. In addition, the panel was asked to address the adequacy of current analytical QOL assessment methods to identify the impact of problems and measure the impact of mitigation efforts on recruitment and retention. To address the tasking, a panel of six NRAC members was augmented with one expert from academia, one retired civilian Navy Education Program Director, five retired flag/general officers, and a retired U.S. Navy Command Master Chief.

QOL has emerged as a serious challenge, with a dramatic impact on recruitment and retention, which are key DON concerns. Military readiness is at issue, and the all-volunteer force may be jeopardized if QOL is not addressed. The panel subtitled the study "Renewing Commitment to Our People" to emphasize the significant challenges facing the Navy and Marine Corps regarding life quality for its people.

The panel defined good QOL as a high level of physical and psychological well being, including a capacity for adaptation to life's challenges, and the social and economic resources necessary to sustain this level. The specific components representing the military QOL are divided into basic, traditional and work areas. Basic issues are defined as pay and compensation, medical care and housing. Traditional issues involve family services, childcare, education, recreation, and exchange/ commissary benefits. Work issues are shipboard living, training, work environment and workload. Leadership issues affect the entire QOL spectrum.

There are many converging factors that influence Navy and Marine Corps QOL, including the end of the "Cold War," rapid technology advances, and a more educated, diverse work force. The need to attract and retain a diverse work force is all encompassing. The DON has an opportunity to embrace the strengths of diversity and provide a model for the rest of our society.

Data indicate that leadership is viewed as the key to a Sailor's and Marine's life quality. Many factors have combined to create and perpetuate an environment where leaders are perceived as risk-averse, more concerned with how they appear rather than how their personnel are treated, and less tolerant of other's errors. As a result, Sailors and Marines indicate they have lost trust and confidence in their military leadership. To reverse this trend, the panel recommends that the Navy and Marine Corps commit to developing the next generation of leaders. The DON leadership should require that all budget and planning decisions consider the impact on quality of work life. In addition, the panel recommends that the Navy and Marine Corps examine contemporary successful leadership examples, identify best practices, and develop and implement a strategic plan to create a Naval environment that maximizes the advantages of a diverse work force, and fosters an environment where leaders can develop, implement, and put people first.

Inadequate pay and compensation continue to be one of the primary factors affecting retention. The panel recommends that the DON maintain pressure on Congress and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) to increase military pay and benefits across the board.

Pride in work clearly affects retention and readiness. Quality of work life is a key concern among Sailors and Marines. Work issues identified are inadequate manning, training, professional development, rest and personal time; excessive drudge work; and poor shipboard living conditions. Facilities and equipment issues include spare parts shortages, outdated tools and equipment, and inadequate computing and communications capabilities. The panel recommends modifying watch-standing requirements, increasing personal and family time in port, contracting out appropriate drudge work, and improving the non-structural aspects of shipboard living on legacy ships as much as possible, to address work condition dissatisfaction. Fully funding spare parts and logistics support on a long-term basis, and aggressive technology insertion into legacy platforms and facilities to reduce costs and workload, will alleviate some of the facilities and equipment concerns.

The DON should develop and implement training strategies that maximize the use of available technology and leverage diverse demographics. Mentoring should be emphasized and rewarded, and improvement sought for matching individuals and job skills. The DON should examine use of a skill-based, dual career path and pay structure for skilled technicians, to increase work force performance and satisfaction.

Thirty-four percent of recruits, today, are deficient in basic academic skills, or fail to meet the academic level equivalent to a high school graduate. The current training program for new recruits does not address this deficiency. Consequently, many recruits are assigned to the Fleet less than adequately equipped to deal with their new military life. This fact attracted major attention from the panel. The panel recommends that the Navy and Marine Corps place a higher priority on providing basic academic skills

training to its personnel as a readiness and quality of work life issue. Further, it recommends that basic academic skills training not be voluntary, but be required prior to the first duty assignment for those recruits who do not meet the basic standards. The panel stresses that if this issue is not dealt with, it will continue to create and retain major obstacles for the "quality of service" and cost the DON in terms of attrition and training investment loss.

Sailors and Marines expect good medical care for themselves and their families. During interviews, the panel heard that the quality of care provided by TRICARE is excellent. However, system access and bill payment issues are serious problems. Recent data reflect improvement, but continued DON attention is necessary.

QOL family issues involve childcare, housing and spouse employment. The panel recommends that the DON increase family services support for new parents, financial counseling, and youth programs; continue to pursue innovative solutions to improve quantity and quality of housing; and enhance programs to support spouse employment, especially after military reassignment.

Additionally, the panel recommends that the DON fund longitudinal research on the response of Sailors and Marines to QoL improvements by studying samples of them throughout their military careers.

The bottom line is that improving the lives of Sailors, Marines and their families must always remain a DON priority.