

# Provisional Support Battalion--An answer for the RBE dilemma

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## COMBAT SERVICE SUPPORT

# Provisional Support Battalion—An Answer for the RBE Dilemma

by Col William J. Glueck, USMCR and LtCol Michael G. Jackson, USMCR

*Remain behind gear is still a dilemma confounding the Corps. The evolution of a relatively new group—the Provisional Support Battalion—should help.*

The Marine Corps is currently, and for the foreseeable future, faced with two conflicting trends. One trend is falling end strength. Strength of the Active forces is continuing downward under fiscal pressure. We are doing better than some of our sister Services, but the need exists to do more with less. A concurrent trend is continuation of deployment and missions. The Marine Corps missions have been little changed by the demise of the Soviet threat. The use of force, expeditionary forces in particular, remains a heavily used option within our Nation's foreign policy.

In both the Gulf War and the Somalia expedition, maritime prepositioning forces (MPF) supplied the initial mainstay of equipment and logistic support for units deployed. In former times, all Marines deployed with their equipment to the operations area. Today Marines may find themselves deployed with what they can carry or fit into the baggage compartment of a commercial aircraft. Major end items, tools, and all manner of expensive, difficult-to-replace equipment will remain behind. Maj Michael E. Kampsen's article (*MCG*, Jul93) outlines the difficulties created by remain behind equipment (RBE) for nondeploying logistics units and the tasks faced by those who must inventory, maintain, and store this equipment and support deployed units at the same time. Maj Kampsen documents the use and misuse of RBE in the Gulf War.

To address this problem, the Marine Corps, through the Reserve Force Structure Planning Group Conference in the spring of 1991, developed a concept—Provisional Support Battalions West and East (PSB-W and PSB-E). These two units, one located at Camp Pendleton, CA, and the other at Camp Lejeune, NC, have the mission to secure, inven-

tory, repair, and move RBE to deployed operating forces. Each Battalion consists of a Headquarters nucleus of 6 officers and 10 enlisted that is prepared to expand to 46 officers and 1,030 enlisted upon mobilization.

These Battalions, under the command of the 4th Force Service Support Group (4th FSSG) acquire their forces from the supply, maintenance, headquarters and service, landing support, and motor transport battalions of the 4th FSSG, each of which are responsible for training and the administration of the individual Marines predesignated for each PSB. When directed, the PSB can be filled out to the strength shown in Table 1. Fewer or greater forces could be included if the situation demands.

The PSB's proposed mission statement calls for it to: "Augment/reinforce active forces for management of remain behind equipment, Marine air-ground task force deployments, in-theater logistic support, and demobilization support." The mission statement results in the PSB taking on tasks in addition to RBE.

The PSB must also augment residual FSSG elements by providing supply and maintenance support to include: ammo/rations; preservation, packing, and packaging; Supported Activities Supply Management; and third and fourth echelon maintenance of all types of ground equipment.

In addition, the PSB must assist in transferring equipment and supplies to and from Selected Marine Corps Reserve units at the station of initial assignment, provide logistics throughput by operating a port operations group and departure airfield control group; provide base support through the fleet assistance program; and, last, provide demobilization support.

Headquarters Marine Corps also ad-

dressed RBE with Change 2 to Marine Corps Order P4400.39F, War Reserve Material Policy Manual. The force commander has overall responsibility for RBE. Initially, the rear party or elements of the deploying unit retain responsibility and control of its equipment. As deployment progresses, RBE is passed to the FSSG for security, inventory, maintenance, and disposition. The force commander determines and designates RBE for internal redistribution within 30 days. RBE cannot be used to exceed tables of equipment but may be used for the following:

- Initial issue to Reserve units.
- 60 days of supply in prepositioned war readiness stock in force.
- Operational readiness float.
- Replacement of prepositioned equipment.

All other material is excess and is reported to the commanding general, Marine Corps Logistical Bases for reallocation.

MCO P4400.39F also directs the force commanders to request, as needed, the PSB to support RBE requirements. Obviously, the 30-day deadline will make it imperative that there be an early determination of the size of the Reserve force and when it will be formed, since the primary concern of PSB in the first 30 days will be resolving RBE. Trained personnel and suitable assets exist within the PSB to resolve those needs, however, detailed planning and knowledge of Reserve structure and mobilization potential must be considered by active duty planning staffs before a PSB call-up, if it is to function smoothly.

Currently, three levels of mobilization exist for the PSBs:

- *Voluntary Active Duty, Annual Training Duty, and Drills.* Each Marine reservist can be ordered to 15 days of active duty in any fiscal year. These days coupled with up to 48 drills per fiscal year, at two

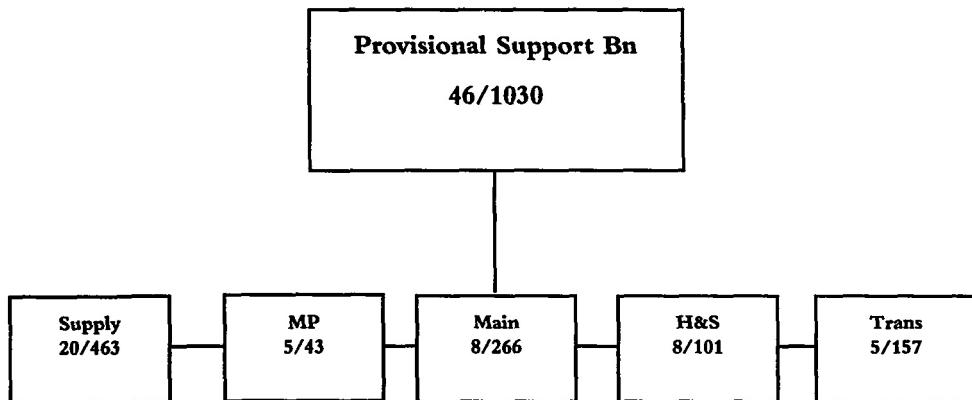


Table 1

drills a day, could be utilized to support unit deployment. Volunteers can be requested by the Secretary of the Navy, however Title 10 limits this authority to 179 consecutive days. The difficulty for reservists is the lack of job protection and uncertainty that this type of volunteer mobilization creates for both Reserve units and individuals.

• *Presidential Selected Reserve Call-up.* During the Gulf War, the 200,000 personnel call-up provided the bulk of Reserve forces. These forces can be deployed for a total of 180 days of active service with individuals enjoying legal protection not covered by voluntary active duty.

• *Partial and Total Mobilization.* Mobilization allows large numbers of Reserve forces to be involuntarily mobilized.

During the Gulf War, the Commandant decided that Reserves would not be mobilized until 60 days after deployments began. This decision was driven by the understandable need to demonstrate that the Marine Corps could respond to a national emergency without mobilizing the Reserves. This policy was in direct contrast to the deliberate policy of the Army, established by Gen Creighton Abrams, USA, to make Reserve mobilization absolutely necessary in any national emergency, so as to ensure public support.

Senior Marines, however, had to be aware that, in regard to the PSB, a similar 60-day restriction would be highly detrimental, because RBE issues must be resolved in the first 30 days of deployment. This does not imply that there has to be an involuntary mobilization of PSB

personnel. The authors are confident that enough volunteers could be obtained within the 4th FSSG to provide at least a partially manned PSB upon request from the Secretary of the Navy. This is especially true of moderate commitments not requiring the full deployment of the active FSSG, thus demanding only elements of the PSB. But the notice must be timely and with the understanding that those reservists being called forth are serving on a voluntary basis. The Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard meet strenuous "real world" missions on a regular basis. The Marine Reserve will support the active forces at least as well.

As suggested by Maj Kampsen, the active FSSG staff needs to determine a trigger point for when the PSB, or parts thereof, should be requested. Command authority must alert 4th FSSG in sufficient time so the inertia of the call-up process can be overcome. In short, PSB will be of no use to the force commander for RBE if it is not called upon until C plus 60; it really needs to be called as soon as possible.

An additional mission of PSB also demands early call-up in a full or major deployment. PSB is tasked to handle Reserve equipment requirements at the station of initial assignment (SIA). Each Reserve unit at each drill center is required to have a detailed plan for movement of its personnel and equipment to the SIA. A manned and ready system of receiving this equipment is imperative to a smooth and timely mobilization and subsequent deployment.

During the Gulf War, as a battalion commander and a mobilization inspec-

tor, we witnessed the chaos caused whenever Reserve units were given detailed instructions about the equipment they should bring to the SIA. There were often conflicting messages for various levels of command. No one seemed to know that the Reserve units already had detailed mobilization plans. Consequently, units were put into disarray without any apparent benefit.

Instead, units should be ordered to the SIA in accordance with existing plans. The "flags" need to go in order to provide the leadership and administrative skills that are needed at a critical and demanding time. Excesses and shortages of equipment should be determined, and PSB personnel should be used to assist in the issuing of equipment for deployment to the theater and managing of the excess Reserve equipment.

In summary, the issues raised by Maj Kampsen's article are being addressed. While numerous detailed and specific questions need to be answered, at least units are being formed to deal with these problems—provisional support battalions. However, it is important for staff planners to realize and appreciate that this is a Reserve unit, so call-up considerations must be anticipated.



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