

Redefining Installations for Future Success

**Making installations a force multiplier
in an ever-changing threat environment**

by LtCol John E. Young (Ret)

"We cannot expect success fighting tomorrow's conflicts with yesterday's weapons or equipment."

—Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America

The Marine Corps is spectacular at putting lead on target, winning battles, and adapting and overcoming nearly any obstacle, except one: modernizing installations.

Problem Framing. The current installation budgetary environment has created a growing backlog of unfunded requirements by restricting funds to only the few most critical. Traditional appropriated funding strategies, including end-of-year disbursements, are unreliable for timely application to force development infrastructural requirements. Strategic priorities and leadership's calls for innovation and change are stymied by institutional bias, status quo, and legacy systems apathy. Installations, facilities, and support infrastructure are an afterthought of force design/force development, and several decades of

>LtCol Young is a retired LtCol 1302-Combat Engineer Officer currently serving as the Assistant Chief of Staff G-4, Marine Corps Systems Command.

subpar prioritization have reinforced Industrial Age inefficiencies in the Information Age.

The Commandant's number one priority is force design. He stated in his 2019 *Commandant's Planning Guidance*,

While we must accept an environment characterized by uncertainty, we cannot ignore strong signals of change nor be complacent when it comes to designing and preparing the force for the future.¹

The Commandant's number one priority is force design.

Further, a *Washington Post* editorial co-authored with U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen Charles Brown Jr., stated,

The current framework is unbalanced and strongly biases spending on the legacy equipment we possess today, much of which was designed in the 1980s and 1990s. While these legacy capabilities may have been instrumental in deterring conflict and winning battles in an earlier era, they no longer provide an edge over competitors.²

The Corps has established processes and procedures relating to future force development and strives to ensure our Corps and our Marines have the best doctrine, organization, training, material, leadership, personnel, and facilities (DOTMLPF). While the Corps has been successful in establishing and executing "DOTMLP," the "F" for *facilities* has never fully integrated into force design and it shows.

As we strive to modernize our Corps and build the force of 2030, many of those Marines and civilians charged with that mission are still housed in facilities designed and built in the early 1900s.³ Military Construction (MILCON) Facilities Sustainment, Restoration and Modernization (FSRM) programs and procedures are ineffective and do not keep pace with the needs of our force. One solution is to integrate installations' upkeep and modernization into the force design planning processes and develop alternative strategies or authorities, allowing the Services to establish or enhance facilities supporting today's needs into the future. The use of Other Transition Authority, Enhanced Use Lease, Public/Private Venture (PPV), Public/Private Partnership, and State/Local Government Partnerships would allow us to keep pace with the evolving needs.

Our installations, facilities support framework, and processes are archaic. Most installations, designed between 1940 and 1960, were built for the Industrial Age, not the Information Age. How do we expect to support tomorrow's weapons and equipment with installations from the Greatest Generation or the Silent Generation? Can you imagine plugging a rotary phone into your 5G cellular system? Brick and mortar buildings are a thing of the past in a digital society, especially when it comes to the speed and dispersion of global threats. We must think beyond typical walls and develop infrastructure

Maybe we should look to the experienced traveler for their global exploratory vacation action. An experienced traveler either brings their infrastructure support with them in the form of an RV or mobile trailer, or they acquire the support at their destination via hotels, bed and breakfast, or AirBnBs. Some travelers, depending on how often they frequent certain destinations, purchase timeshares. To support our strategy in the Pacific, supporting infrastructure in Australia via a Fed timeshare option or a FedBnB model would be a way of addressing regional threats in a way that does not commit us to lines of fund-

gressional approval. Here is the best-case scenario for MILCON:

- Year 1: Project development using same years cost estimates.
- Year 2: Approval Process (Installation, MCICOM, and Congress) and allocation of funds.
- Year 3: Architect & Engineering Designs.
- Year 4: Construction.

In most cases material costs and construction costs change annually; what you planned in Year 1 funding will not support the construction in Year 4, therefore the project gets downsized. That is best-case scenario. In my over 36 years of Marine Corps service, I have never seen a best-case scenario for MILCON.

In contrast, while it takes us four years to construct each facility, China built artificial islands with a total area of close to 3,000 acres on seven coral reefs in the span of two years. Then, in the following two years, these islands were fully militarized with diverse operational capability. The discrepancy between what they are able to accomplish in four years versus what we are barely able to accomplish is astonishing.

FSRM. Next, let us examine how the Corps maintains and improves its existing infrastructure as directed in *MCO 11000.5, Facilities Sustainment, Restoration and Modernization (FSRM) Program*. FSRM and the installation's facilities are designed to be supportive of commanders and their personnel mission requirements. Per *MCO 11000.5*, if the work, looks, or smells like construction, then only the Installation Commander has the authority to expend FSRM funding. Unit commanders whose personnel are working in facilities on these installations have no ability to make minor fixes which would support good order, discipline, and welfare, enhancing the working environment of their Marines or Marine civilians. Unit commanders have no ability because they—unlike installation commanders—are not authorized FSRM funding, yet they are responsible for government equipment and the safety welfare/morale of their personnel.

In my personal experience, it took six to nine months and many man-

In contrast, while it takes us four years to construct each facility, China built artificial islands with a total area of close to 3,000 acres on seven coral reefs in the span of two years.

capacity and capabilities which are agile, global, and enhance our Corps' mission requirements. Could using the existing infrastructures, such as airstrips data/communications centers, of PPVs or international partnerships be such a tool?

Do non-deploying headquarters elements that rely heavily on highly qualified civilians and military members to modernize and innovate our Corps need to fully occupy existing on-base facilities? Or would it be better for these force development organizations—which must hire and retaining these innovative and forward thinkers—to provide facilities more like those of the commercial industry's tech giants? It is no secret that Google has been and is one of the best companies with the most innovative and highest levels of job satisfaction of any company in America. Google, like the Marine Corps, understands that the most valuable asset they have is their personnel and has calculated that a happy healthy workforce is more productive. Google is just another example of where the Marine Corps can look to their success in facilities infrastructure and adapt it to meet the Corps drive for future success.

ing beyond the short-term need. This is a new concept for the DOD, but one that keeps our forces arrayed in a way that is flexible and loosens the restrictions inherent in the traditional way of supporting infrastructure. Travelers rarely—if ever—purchase real estate or infrastructure that is stagnant in location or capacity or capability. The Corps' expeditionary requirements and the ever-changing global threats require a level of planning, agility, efficiency, and effectiveness of results by prioritization for supporting infrastructure far exceeding our lackadaisical efforts of the past. Marine Corps installations and infrastructure are vital warfighting support for all current and future missions and must become the force multiplier our Corps needs. That can only be done by integrating within the force development processes and thinking outside of the proverbial box.

MILCON. We develop and plan facilities' needs by creating a Basic Facilities Requirement (BFR), which is essentially "one butt to one seat." We then use the BFR to create a DD1391 for MILCON and Congressional approval. Not all facilities projects require Con-

hours at the GS-14 and 15 level (at an estimated \$70/hr) so the installation could purchase \$600 in paint. These funds had to be reprogrammed from Operational and Maintenance Marine Corps dollars to FSRM dollars in order to make the purchase, which essentially waisted far more money than should be required for buying paint. I have no idea why it took six to nine months when this paint could have been purchased via Government Commercial Purchase Card within hours—if only the local unit commander had the authority to do so. The results of the process wasted countless time, salary, and energy. That process is neither efficient nor effective and shows a lack of trust in our commander's ability to make appropriate decisions with regards to their personnel's working environment.

As I stated earlier, the Marine Corps is outstanding at solving most problems and accomplishes this feat by utilizing the Marine Corps Planning Process-Process, which consists of six steps: Problem Framing, Course of Action (COA) development, COA Wargaming, COA Comparison and Decision, Orders Development, and Transition. I suspect this would be a great model for solving FSRM problems, but instead, the Corps relies on one of crisis management. In other words: *fix it when it is broken—if you have the funds*. The Corps must learn to plan better in all aspects of our warfighting capabilities including installation support to ensure future relevance. A continued use of crisis maintenance management will only continue the detrimental drain on our precious limited resources.

Making Installations a Force Multiplier. It is time to “propose a new framework for defining readiness, one that better balances today’s needs with those of tomorrow, incorporating elements of current availability, modernization and risk.”⁴ Our most valuable assets have always been our warfighters and all of their supporting mechanisms (families, equipment, etc.). Now more than ever, “Retention of the most talented individuals within the institution is critical.”⁵ Back in the late 1980s and early 1990s, installations were referred to as the Fifth Element of the MAGTF,

which had a certain ring to it. There was a hope that referring to installations in this fashion would create a better focus on installation requirements; however, those words proved hollow back then and continue to do so now.

Our installation focus remains embedded in 20th century designs, hindered by brick-and-mortar concepts and completely void of commercial and technological advances. If the recent pandemic has shown us anything, it is that some organizations can be completely successful at high rates of telework. This proposal is right in line with creating installation plans that will make our installations force multipliers for the MAGTFs they support:

The unintended consequence of this existing planning process has been to create a physical environment that is too expensive to sustain and does not meet the needs of today’s, or the future’s, warfighters or their missions. We must move toward mixed-use, data enabled, flexible use buildings that industry has been building for the last few decades. Without a change in the approach to design, low-utilization and the deferred maintenance hole will continue to deepen.⁶

How do we integrate installations into force design and make them a force multiplier? Based on my experience, I propose a few suggestions below:

Create a Warfighter-Centric Approach. Evaluate each installation and the units on them. Understand that each installation is unique to its mission, the capabilities required for that mission and its locational impacts to that mission. Understand and review each organization and their mission essential task lists and what the installations must provide for those organizations to be successful. Create BFRs reflecting mission essential task lists, digital age workforce needs, and increased distributed workforce (i.e. telework). Review installation locations for facilities and support services that are available outside the gates.

Create flexibility and agility in Installations. “We must communicate with precision and consistency, based on a common focus and a unified message.”⁷ Create flexible open facilities, not single-mission focused facilities. Utilize

Concept Development Documents vice DD1391. Consolidate organizations with collaborative mission requirements creating walkable mission focus campus (e.g., Combat Development & Integration, Marine Corps Warfighting Lab and Marine Corps Systems Command). Creating a highly professional symbiotic atmosphere will not only enhance force design and development but also enable us to retain and recruit the best and brightest workforce.

Leverage commercial or private assets to meet deficiencies. Explore and create alternatives acquisition solution sets to get installations closer to the speed of relevance. Implement Enhanced Use Lease, Other Transition Authority, PPVs, Public/Private Partnership, and State/Local Government Partnerships in order to provide our Marines and workforce who supports them the facilities they need and deserve. Revise or cancel MCO 11000.5 to allow Commander’s FSRM funding so they can have an immediate working environment impact on our most valuable resource, our personnel, and revise to allow for the tracking of spending for accounting purposes even under this greater freedom of execution.

Establish the full integration of installations/facilities planners within the force development organizations (Combat Development & Integration, Marine Corps Warfighting Lab, and Marine Corps Systems Command). The walls between strategic planning and community planning need to be removed in an all-domain operational environment. We should create an Installation, Services and Support Element Integration Division within CD&I because requirements development should include the tail as well as the tooth of the fight. We should also realign or reallocate some installation planners from public works departments to larger operational commands on that installation, allowing their focus to be more on organization missions needs specifically addressing the installations which they occupy.

Now is the time to rethink how we plan for installation requirements: how we remake them into a true Fifth Element of our MAGTF, build them to be force multipliers, and transform them

to being an integral part of the future force design construct. Now is the time to “deliver performance at the speed of relevance and organize for innovation.”⁸ The Marine Corps has always been the tip of the spear, first in, last out, and leading the way. The only thing that is stopping us from leading installation and support services improvement design is our fear of change.

As we modernize the Marine Corps for 2030, let us ensure that we not only have an FMF that is ready and relevant but let us also make sure that they have facilities that support their missions. As President Theodore Roosevelt once said, “The best thing you can do is the right thing: the next best thing you can do is the wrong thing; the worst thing you can do is nothing.”

Notes

1. Gen David H. Berger, *38th Commandant’s Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC: July 2019).
2. Gen David H. Berger and Gen Charles Q. Brown, Jr., “To Compete with China And Russia, The U.S. Military Must Redefine ‘Readiness,’” *Washington Post*, (February 2021), available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com>.
3. Marine Corps Systems Command current headquarters was built in 1937 as a Naval Hospital and the most recent renovation was 2001. This renovation did little to change the capability of the old hospital to support the Marine Corps Command that has sole responsibility of delivering material solutions support force design. Marine Corps Systems Command headquarters is still designed to be a hospital not a research, development, testing, and evaluation acquisition center of excellence. Information available at <https://www.usmcu.edu>.
4. Ibid.
5. *38th Commandant’s Planning Guidance*.
6. Arrowstreet, “The Base of the Future: A Warfighter-Centric Approach to Facilities and Services,” *Issuu*, (May 2019), available at <https://issuu.com>.
7. *38th Commandant’s Planning Guidance*.
8. Department of Defense, *National Defense Strategy*, (Washington, DC: 2018).



2021 LtCol Earl “Pete” Ellis Essay Contest



The Ellis Contest Awards are made possible through the generous partnership of Dominion Energy.



In an essay of 2500 to 3000 words, answer the following question:

Given the growing importance of Marine Corps installations as platforms for force projection and sustainment, what innovations will be required to support the future force designed to conduct a range of expeditionary operations including EABO? What changes or advances in ranges and training areas; virtual and constructive training support; energy, security and maintenance infrastructure and community relations/public-private partnerships are most important to the future of installations?

Contest open to all Marines, academics, industry, and science/technology personnel. Participants associated with the sponsor(s) and the *Gazette* editorial advisory panel may not compete.

Awards

1st Place
\$2,500 and a plaque/trophy

2nd Place
\$1,000 and a plaque/trophy

Two Honorable Mentions
\$500 each and a plaque/trophy

Contest runs 1 August to 31 October