

A call to (a little better) service

BY MAJ. JOSEPH L. MORENO

Quality customer service at Camp Pendleton is hard to find. Simply getting the items Marines need — even the things we need to go to war — can be frustrating and futile.

Marines spend far too much of their off-duty time being poorly served. I joke with my wife that, once you go aboard Camp Pendleton, it is as if you are visiting a second-world, socialist country vice capitalist businesses.

I visited the Uniform Shop on Oct. 9, a Saturday, to get fitted for a uniform. The previous day, when I was there, I was told that it would be open from "9 a.m. to 3 p.m." on Saturday. I arrived at 1:04 p.m. to locked doors with signs saying the Uniform Shop would be closing Saturday at 1 p.m. and that it would be closed on Monday in observance of Columbus Day. Perhaps those signs were posted on Friday (but not visible due to the doors being propped open) and the employee made a mistake when she told me Saturday's hours of operation.

But don't feel badly for me.

Imagine, for example, the frustration when a young Marine, getting ready for the Ball, travels from the outlying camps on the bus, only to find the Uniform Shop closed during normal hours of operation. While we don't expect hotel-management customer service, just being open and, more importantly, stocking critical items would go a long way. Closer to our own professional experiences: Imagine our frustration when we have visited our battalion supply section to check out gear during normal hours of operation, only to find that supply is closed.

Let me share my personal observation of how this problem is contagious: A hard-charging noncommissioned officer makes a DRMO run, base laundry run, landfill run, etc., only to be turned away, with no reasonable explanation, because the destination was closed during their normal hours of operation. This Marine has wasted six to eight man-hours after loading up

their 5-ton or 7-ton and traveling to their destination. This hard charger's attitude has just gotten a little worse; the Marine returns to his/her unit with this negative attitude.

But even when the store is open, things can go seriously wrong.

Why are important items continually out of stock? It took me nearly two months to get a set of the new MarPat uniform — certainly not from a lack of trying. After making several trips to the Uniform Shop, I was told that Cash Sales at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego stocked the uniforms, too. I visited MCRD on a Saturday, only to find it closed; their posted hours were Mondays through Fridays.

Fair enough. After some more futile visits to the Camp Pendleton Uniform Shop, I returned on a weekday to MCRD's Cash Sales — only to find that it was closed between Christmas and New Year's Day. Throughout all this, no estimated delivery day could be provided.

Calls to the Camp Pendleton Uniform Shop to confirm that items were in stock were answered with a "yes." But when I arrived later that same day, the item was not in stock. Frustration results when reality is not in line with expectations.

For Marine Corps Exchanges to have limited hours because there is no demand is understandable. But that is not the case. When it comes to haircuts, dry cleaning and uniform items, Oceanside and San Clemente businesses flourish in the shadow of our poor service — except when it comes to the MarPat uniform, which cannot be purchased in town.

This problem goes beyond just the quality-of-life issue. It can be critical during wartime. In all my visits to purchase the MarPat uniform, I was also looking to buy a pair of the new combat boots — certainly not an item I was willing to purchase without first trying them on. To find my size, in stock, took more than six months. I could have obtained the boots sooner if I'd have pursued them as per-

sistently as I courted the MarPat uniforms. But human nature is what it is, and I was willing to make only so many trips to the Uniform Shop and the SOI PX.

I believe we should make it a higher priority to value our Marines' time, since it is one of their nonreplenishable assets. I am sure most Marines aboard Camp Pendleton have experienced exactly what I speak of; and perhaps it is better now than it has been in the past. But, it could easily be better if we just try a little harder and care a little more.

For starters, updating Camp Pendleton's Web sites monthly would be great for Marines with Internet access. The Officers' Club does an excellent job at this task. Also, developing Web sites that are more easily navigated and make it easier to find information would go a long way. A bigger win would be for stores to keep stocks better replenished while sticking to their hours of operation.

Empowering employees and Marines would go a long way, too. When employees and Marines have no understanding of how the quality of their service affects people, they won't try. Unfortunately, improving our business processes was a flash in pan 10 years ago, when the Navy and Marine Corps more accurately rebranded Total Quality Management as Total Quality Leadership. Simply showing employees how "the system" works and where they fit in can go a long way.

For instance, instead of the Uniform Shop employee simply stating that the items are not in stock, the employee could place a special, non-binding order, with estimated delivery date, for that Marine. This tells the Marines they're being served and creates a sense of pride in the employee, since they have satisfied the customers.

Such pride is visible when I visit Barnes and Noble or Borders in search of a book that is out of stock.

Another recommendation is to simply look at organizations like Wal-Mart, which takes the same quality employee who serves us on Camp Pendleton and empowers them in seemingly insignificant tasks such as "door greeter." While I'm not recommending hiring greeters, I am pointing out an example of how the little things can make a big difference, even at bottom-line-conscious businesses.

Although the Uniform Shop took the brunt of the "face shots" in this commentary, it is just one example — and it is not all doom and gloom. More times than not, I have received excellent and thorough service at the Uniform Shop, especially from the more-senior employees. Obviously, there are some things we can do better.

The Marines serving today are of the highest quality the Marine Corps has ever seen. They are smarter, better-trained and better-led; they are better prepared and outfitted with higher quality equipment; they are better respected by America than at any other time in my 19 years since becoming a Marine. Their quality of life is better, even on the battlefield, with technological advances like e-mail and satellite phones.

We can extend this positive trend aboard Camp Pendleton.

The takeaway point from this commentary should be to provide the best possible service. We can all make a better hamburger than McDonald's; but we can predict what the "McDonald's experience" will be because they are consistent. This is why brand is so important to civilian companies. After all, in today's world of three-letter abbreviations, we could easily shorten CSSE (Combat Service Support Element) to CSE just by removing the words "service."

Moreno serves as the S-4 officer for 4th Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion.

Commentary

Uniform stock not fully controlled by MCRD

Uniform stock not fully controlled by MCCS

BY LEE FARMER

As the assistant chief of staff for Marine Corps Community Services, I take a personal interest in making sure that that our Marines, sailors, and their families get the best service possible at the available facilities. I also appreciate knowing concerns about the goods and services that we provide. As dedicated as our staff is, there is much room for improvement.

Maj. Moreno's comment about the Uniform Shop being closed on Oct. 9 at 1 p.m. vice the advertised time of 3 p.m. is indeed a concern that I have addressed with our staff. This action obviously was not a good call and will not be repeated.

We really would like to have control of the stock and availability of the MarPat uniform and boots. We are re-

quired to do MILSTRIP ordering and not commercial ordering for the MarPat uniforms and desert boots. MCCS then sells the uniforms, at cost, to the Marines as a service. The challenge to the system is that the demand outstrips production. We continue to raise the shortage issue, but the supply system simply has not caught up with the field. Unfortunately, Camp Pendleton is not the only base in this situation. Additionally, according to the priority schedule for distribution, retail activities are No. 4 behind deployed combat troops, the recruit training commands and the Consolidated Training Allowance Pool. We have the appropriate level of items on order but just cannot get them. We obviously do not control the shipping schedule nor can we forecast the shipping dates. With Marines being redeployed and

summer loads finished at the recruit depots, we expect shortages that have existed since the MarPat and the new boots were introduced will ease.

When a patron calls, we certainly might have an item in stock. Unfortunately, the item may be NIS by the time he arrives. There are times when a busload of Marines arrives without notice, and the majority obviously needs the same type of items. This surge could easily reduce or completely wipe out the limited stock of certain items on hand.

We are working hard to provide the Marines the quality service they so rightfully deserve. A lot has been done to promote customer service and more actions are under way. Hopefully, Marines will be properly served as we make the efforts to provide good service to the Camp Pendleton communi-

Scouting Around

“What do you think of the services and supply at the Cash Sales on base?”

“They need to improve their customer service. Every time I go in there, they are too busy to help me with what I need.”



Lance Cpl. Erica A. Leos
1st Force Service Support Group



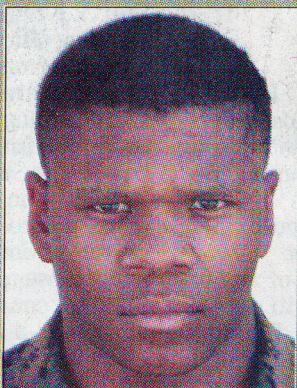
Cpl. Franciso N. Vallejo
Marine Corps Base

“To me, the hours need to change, the hours of availability, as well as the variety and amount of supply. I’ve driven to Miramar and MCRD for the things that I’ve needed.”

**“Overall, it’s good.
Not quite as
much selection as
compared to some
of our other bases.
The service seems to
be good support. I’d
recommend that
facility needs to be
expanded”**



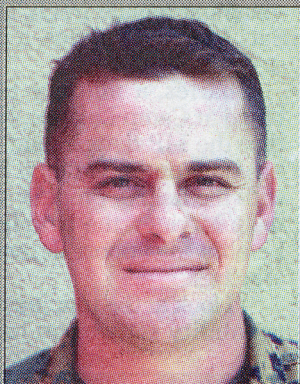
**Lt. Col. Bart S. Sloat
1st Marine Division**



**Lance Cpl. Jasper C. Marshall
I Marine Expeditionary Force**

**“The cash sales
is pretty good.
Everything is
cheap there, and
the people treat
you well.”**

**“It’s always packed,
and there is never
enough uniforms
in stock, especially
around the Marine
Corps Ball and
deployments. I’m
glad it’s there to
meet our needs.”**



**Staff Sgt. John M. Ragole
1st Force Service Support Group**



**Sgt. Danitza Noriega
1st Force Service Support Group**

**“They need to
improve their stock
and their customer
service needs a lot
of help. They never
seem to have what
you need.”**