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By 1stLt. Joe Skryd

"Lt. Skryd, I need six-, 10-, and 16-plane embark lists. I also need you to work the core-competency matrix. I want to make sure we spread out our qualifications to staff two simultaneous detachments or a full squadron deployment, if we have to."

That was the tasking Maj. Brad Gering gave me at about 10 a.m. (Pacific time), on Sept. 11, 2001. The Marine Corp's competency matrix is a project initiated by Col. Mark Savarese, the commanding officer of Marine Air Group-13 (MAG-13), to provide a tool to ensure maintenance departments have the depth and qualifications to carry out their missions. The matrix is a program that identifies a unit as being ready to deploy as a whole squadron, in part, or as a six-plane detachment. The drafts of the matrix were refined many times by the AMOs of MAG-13 and have evolved into much more.

Most Marine squadrons return from deployment, and, with a gush of wind, their Marines transfer. While other units gain this valuable talent, the original unit is left with an experience gap. Similar to professional sports teams after a championship season, squadrons go into a rebuilding stage.

The matrix is an easy-to-use tool that monitors the squadron's progression. The Black Sheep's maintenance chief, MSgt. Michael Conroy, uses the matrix as firepower when he goes to MAG-13 to request more people. The program identifies deficient qualifications, and it indicates personnel shortcomings—by Table of Organization line number.

To develop the matrix and to identify the core requirements for a maintenance department, we had to answer numerous questions: How many shifts of maintenance would work in a 24-hour period? Would we be land-based or sea-based? Would any level of host nation or inter-service support be available? What level of intermediate maintenance activity (IMA) support would be present? What operational tempo could we expect? The result was a program that gives a maintenance department the ability to monitor qualifications and the flexibility to deploy in every clime and place.

The core-competency matrix is a useful tool for workcenter supervisors and division officers. It allows them to monitor Marines' progress and to counsel them on shortcomings. Using historical averages, understanding all Marines don't have the same aptitude for

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a given MOS, and considering the detailed actions that needed to be completed, we developed realistic time-to-train metrics for obtaining specific qualifications.

When new Marines check into the squadron, they are told what training to expect in their workcenter. Marines also can measure their progress throughout their tour.

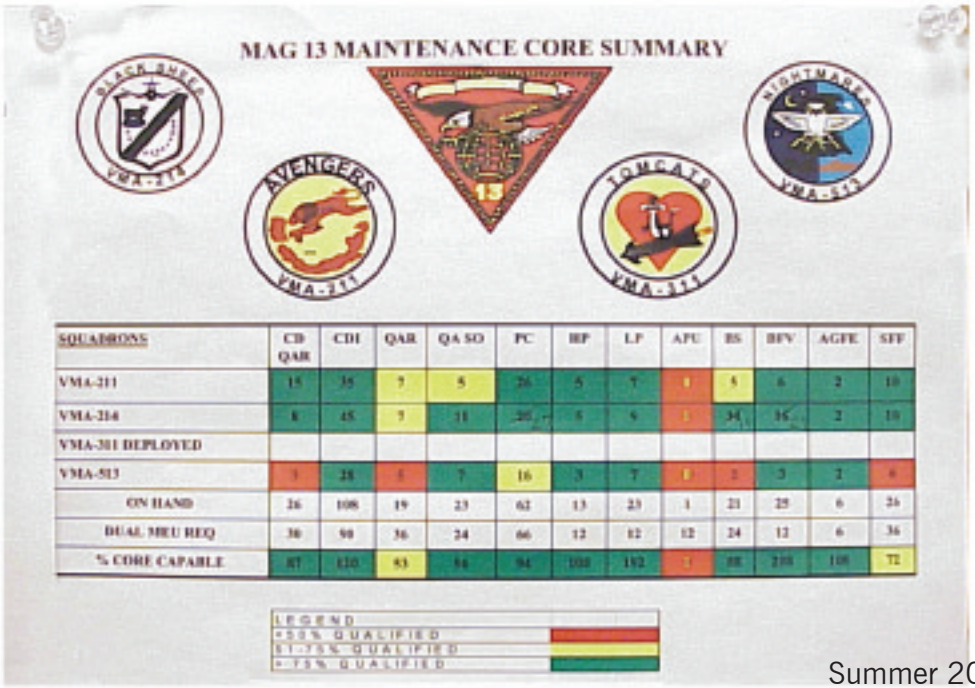
VMA-214's commanding officer, LtCol. Mike Santacroce, tasked the maintenance department to shift leadership, talent and qualifications to night and mid-crews. This was done to improve the support for a 10-hour flight schedule. After distributing copies of the matrix, we sat down in the conference room and determined how many CDIs, CDQARs and QARs were on each shift. The required reference information already was available in the matrix. We then looked at the distribution of SNCOs and NCOs on each shift. Realizing the matrix cannot measure a Marine's drive, motivation or troubleshooting ability, we first identified the essential players. After filling key billets and qualifications, we then determined the qualifications and the number of workers who needed to change shifts. Workcenter supervisors then were tasked to designate Marines to meet the new requirements. For example, Powerline might have been directed to shift one CDI and four workers to mid-crew, while making sure they also added one borescope-qualified Marine and one high-power-qualified Marine.

The matrix regularly is shown at the MAG-13 Aviation Logistics (AVLOG) brief. Individual squadron matrices are submitted to Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron (MALS-13) for inclusion in their brief. This allows the MAG-13 CO to assess each squadron's maintenance competency, to identify areas of weakness, and to assist or counsel Marines needing corrective action.

Updates to the matrix have not been as tedious as I originally had expected. I cringed at the thought of another paperwork chain. Keeping the matrix current has required the AMO, maintenance chief, and me to communicate regularly. After the AMO signs a qualification, he forwards the paperwork to me. The maintenance chief tells me of personnel changes, departmental moves, and promotions. Updates are recorded in a notebook once a week. The entire process adds only about an hour a week to an AAMO's workload.

In the future, I envision an electronic MATMEP directly tied to NALCOMIS inputs, which would allow a core-competency matrix or similar report to be produced with the touch of a few keys.

The MAG-13 summary gives a sample of the progress mapped by the competency matrix. The squadron version is much more detailed.



SQUADRONS	CD QAR	CDI	QAR	QA SO	PC	IRF	LP	APU	BS	IHV	AGFE	SFF
VMA-211	15	35	7	5	26	5	7	1	5	6	2	10
VMA-214	8	45	7	11	20	6	9	1	34	16	2	10
VMA-311 DEPLOYED												
VMA-513	3	28	5	7	16	3	7	0	2	3	2	6
ON HAND	26	108	19	23	62	13	23	1	21	25	6	26
DUAL MEU REQ	30	90	36	24	66	12	12	12	24	12	6	36
% CORE CAPABLE	87	120	53	96	94	108	192	8	88	208	100	72

1stLt. Skryd wrote this article while assigned as the AAMO at VMA-214, Yuma, Ariz.