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THE EROSION OF THE ENLISTED FORCE:  
A STUDY OF ATTRITION

by

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## *Contents*

	<i>Page</i>
DISCLAIMER .....	ii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS .....	v
LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
PREFACE .....	vii
ABSTRACT .....	viii
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW .....	1
The Statistics .....	1
Significance of Attrition- Why Worry About It? .....	2
The Air Force Enlisted Attrition Study .....	3
Areas of Study .....	3
Conclusion and Summary .....	4
AIR FORCE ATTRITION DATA REVIEW .....	5
Attrition Data: Recruit Characteristics .....	5
The Characteristics .....	6
Attrition Data: Enlistment Phase I .....	8
Data Review .....	8
Attrition Data: Enlistment Phase II .....	11
Data Review .....	11
Attrition Rate for Men .....	12
Attrition Rate for Women .....	13
Separation Codes: Clouding the Picture? .....	13
Attrition Data Conclusions .....	14
RECRUITING ISSUES .....	16
Current Recruiting Practices .....	16
Assignment of Recruiters .....	16
Recruiter Training .....	16
How Recruiting Goals Are Set .....	17
Recruiting a Potential Enlistee .....	17
The Enlistment Process .....	18
Recruiting Incentive Programs .....	19

Extra Pay and Perks .....	19
Individual Rewards .....	19
Pool and Propensity of Potential Recruits .....	20
Pool of Potential Recruits .....	20
Propensity of Potential Recruits.....	20
Recruiter Complaints .....	21
Recruiting Issues Conclusions .....	21
THE AIR FORCE’S ATTRITION REDUCTION EFFORTS .....	23
Reduction Goal .....	23
PROPOSED FY00 ATTRITION REDUCTION PLAN .....	25
Recruit Characteristics as Attrition Markers.....	25
Recruiter Screening Tools.....	25
Education Program Changes.....	26
Phase I: Reducing Attrition in the Accession to 6 <sup>th</sup> Month Period by Revamping the Recruiting System .....	26
Institute Recruiter Attrition Training.....	27
Improve Recruiter Manning.....	27
Transform Recruiters into Job Counselors and Placement Officers .....	27
Recruiting Goals Revamped .....	28
Recruiter Incentive Changes .....	28
DEP Issues .....	29
Physical Fitness.....	29
Medical Screening .....	30
Phase II – Reducing Attrition in the 7-48 Month Enlistment Period.....	30
Separation Codes and Data Collection Improvements .....	30
Exit Surveys .....	30
Using Available Models .....	30
Policy Changes.....	31
Revisit Pregnancy Separations.....	31
More Cross Training Opportunities for CDC Failures .....	31
Scrutinize Misconduct Separations for Potential Rehabilitation and Retention...	31
Do Away with Reenlistments: Make Everyone Indefinite .....	31
CONCLUSION .....	33
APPENDIX A: ATTRITION DATA.....	34
GLOSSARY .....	42
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	43

## *List of Illustrations*

	<i>Page</i>
Figure 1 All DOD Recruits from FY 87-96 Who Failed to Finish Their First Term.....	34
Figure 2 Air Force 6 and 48-Month Attrition Rates from the FY 82-FY 93 Cohort .....	35
Figure 3 Air Force 48-Month Attrition Rate by Age at Enlistment, FY 93 Cohort.....	35
Figure 4 Air Force 48-Month Attrition Rate by Education Level, FY 93 Cohort .....	36
Figure 5 Air Force 48-Month Attrition Rate by Gender, FY 93 Cohort.....	36
Figure 6 Air Force 48-Month Attrition Rate by AFQT Test Score and Corresponding Category, FY 93 Cohort.....	37
Figure 7 Air Force 48-Month Attrition Rate by Race, FY 93 Cohort.....	37
Figure 8 Air Force 36-Month Attrition Rate by Employment Factors, FY 84 Cohort .....	38
Figure 9 Air Force 48-Month Attrition Rate by Career Field, Slide 1 .....	38
Figure 10 Air Force 48-Month Attrition Rate by Career Field, Slide 2.....	39
Figure 11 Reasons for Male Attrition in the Air Force Between 7 <sup>th</sup> and 48 <sup>th</sup> Month, FY 93 Cohort.....	39
Figure 12 Reasons for Female Attrition in the Air Force Between 7 <sup>th</sup> and 48 <sup>th</sup> Month, FY 93 Cohort.....	40
Figure 13 Figure 14 Conceptual View of the Enlistment Process .....	40

*List of Tables*

	<i>Page</i>
Table 1 Investment per Enlistee and Total 0-6 Month Attrition Cost.....	9

## *Preface*

The Department of Defense (DOD) has studied enlisted attrition for over twenty years, and yet one fact remains unchanged: one third of all enlisted members recruited will not complete their first term of service, at a cost of \$390 million each year. This topic captured my attention while serving at the Pentagon as a congressional inquiries officer in 1993; in a one year period, I addressed over one hundred complaints from recruits separated either at Basic Military Training (BMT) or Technical Training School for problems that might have been addressed prior to accession. Later, while a Mission Support Squadron Commander from 1996-1998, I screened miscellaneous separation packages for the Wing Commander and was surprised by the number of applications, almost guaranteed support from the command chain and a governing regulation that opened the door for thousands of applicants each year Air Force-wide. Attrition is a complex, multi-faceted issue; it has extraordinary monetary and force structure implications if a plan for reversal is not immediately built and implemented. Perhaps my in depth research into root causes, symptoms and possible solutions will assist USAF policymakers to develop an aggressive action plan for Fiscal Year 2000 to reverse this 20 year trend.



### *Abstract*

Attrition happens when the service makes a “bad match” and a person they have invested in leaves the military prematurely for civilian life. Unfortunately, this poor selection is made about 15 percent of the time. Attrition also happens when those who fall below standards are not rehabilitated or airmen separate for miscellaneous reasons on their terms; this loss takes another 20 percent out of the force. Attrition exacts both a human and monetary bill that we can not afford to keep paying. I contend that attrition is predictable, preventable and alterable; this report will point the way. First, I have isolated a set of characteristics proven to be related to attrition to screen potential recruits. Secondly, I assert that separation instructions are too permissive in nature and do not give the commander enough latitude to rehabilitate or retain members. Finally, I explore whether problems with the recruiting system aggravate attrition and if addressed, will lower the rate. The USAF does not have an attrition reduction plan; targets are set each year but there is no time phased coordinated plan for lowering attrition. I have built a plan for FY 2000 that would give an Attrition Tiger Team a place to start. The Air Force is not a victim of attrition: we have created the problem and we can fix it.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction and Overview

*Attrition* [Latin *attritio*; to wear or rub away] 3. A gradual reduction in membership or personnel, as through retirement or death.

American Heritage College Dictionary, 1993, page 89.

Enlisted attrition has been the topic of research since the late 1970s, when the U.S. Army asked the RAND Corporation to investigate why one third of its recruits never completed their initial term of enlistment. For at least the last decade, attrition rates for all service branches have hovered at the one-third mark despite programs designed to entice high quality people not only to enlist, but also to stay in the service.<sup>1</sup> Is attrition, as the definition above suggests, a part of the normal course of events in an organization? What is “good” attrition? Is some attrition necessary to weed out undesirables from the military? These are questions that policymakers in all branches of the service have struggled with for years; the inability to answer them may be tied to a lack of a joint, concerted effort to address and solve the attrition problem.

### The Statistics

The statistics are staggering: the General Accounting Office (GAO) estimates in their January 1998 report to Congress on recruiting practices that between FY87 and FY96, DOD sent 2.2 million recruits to Basic Military Training (BMT). After “shipping out” for BMT, over 700,000 of those recruits failed to complete their initial service obligation, with 200,000 not even

finishing 90 days (Figure 1, Appendix A).<sup>2</sup> Here is a visual exercise used at the Marine Corps Recruiting School to drive home to cost of attrition to their new recruiters: 100 people stand, representing 100 new recruits. First, 19 people sit down, representing those that fail to enlist after entry in the Delayed Enlistment Program (DEP). Another 12 sit down, representing those that will not make it through BMT. Finally, 25 more sit down, representing the rest of those lost during the first term. In the end, 56 people are gone, leaving only 44 to finish the first term of enlistment.<sup>3</sup> These numbers represent the Air Force's situation, as well; the services over-recruit in an already tough market to make up for attrition losses.

How much does this over-recruiting and eventual attrition cost? In their September 1998 follow-on report to Congress, the GAO reported that each attrition costs the DOD \$35,532, for a total of \$1.3 billion spent on the 72,670 attrited members since 1993.<sup>4</sup> The bulk of the monetary cost is on those who depart before the end of 6 months; once enlistees are assigned to jobs, the services begin to receive returns on their investment.<sup>5</sup> The loss of personnel after the beginning of the seventh month does not represent a monetary loss, but a reduced return on investment. The Air Force's share of attrition loss hovers around \$46 million annually; the GAO contends that by reducing 6-month attrition by 4 percent, the service would reap \$5-\$12 million short-term and a 10 percent reduction would yield \$15-\$39 million over the long term.<sup>6</sup>

### **Significance of Attrition- Why Worry About It?**

Attrition rates have held steadily for 20 years, yet the military continues to meet recruiting goals and enjoy an ever-improving quality force capable of protecting our country and deterring aggression. So, why worry about attrition? The problem of attrition is significant for several reasons, the first of which is the \$46 million the Air Force spends on recruits each year that will not stay. The money factor relates to credibility on the Hill: simply put, until the Air Force either

proves to Congress that attrition is an unavoidable and desirable way to do business or lowers the attrition rate, it will continue to address yearly the millions “wasted” on recruits that aren’t going to stay. Secondly, by isolating certain characteristics, we can focus our recruiting and counseling efforts accordingly. Furthermore, the attributes allow us to analyze a cohort of enlistees, predicting attrition and moving the manpower, personnel and recruiting leadership to an offensive, rather than defensive position. Finally, an important byproduct of the study of attrition yields fresh data on high quality recruits: we learn who they are, and how to attract and retain them. Since the goal is to stop attrition before enlistment, we find that recruiting practices, incentives and training are important keys to solving this problem. FY 99 may be the first year in the last 20 that the USAF does not meet its recruiting goals; lowering quality and shuffling DEP enrollees between fiscal years are not viable solutions.

### **The Air Force Enlisted Attrition Study**

This study proves there are attrition characteristics, recruiting system issues and Air Force policy guidance that contribute to attrition. I have created a compendium of all available data and material specifically related to the Air Force attrition problem; this data, along with my proposed FY 00 plan, can easily serve as a starting point for change within the service.

#### **Areas of Study**

The following major areas of study will thoroughly address the attrition issue.

**Air Force Attrition Data Review.** We will spend a great deal of time looking at the raw data; it will isolate attrition markers and predictors. For purposes of this project, attrition data is studied three ways; recruit characteristics for the entire 48 month term of enlistment, and in two

major enlistment periods: a)“shipping out” to the end of sixth month on active duty and b) 7-48 months of enlistment. We will also address problems with separation codes that cloud the data.

**Recruiting Issues.** Next, we will address the issue of recruiting, specifically current recruiting practices, recruiter incentives and complaints, and the pool and propensity of prospective recruits. This section will tie recruiting issues to attrition.

**The Air Force’s FY 99 Attrition Reduction Efforts.** This area critically addresses current Air Force efforts and numerical attrition reduction goals.

**Proposed FY 00 Action Plan.** An action plan for lowering the rate of attrition is proposed; areas covered are using recruit characteristics as attrition markers, making fundamental changes to the recruiting system, improving data collection and enacting policy changes.

## **Conclusion and Summary**

After a quick summary of the data review, findings and recommendations, there is a discussion on the implications of this study.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> GAO Report to Congress, 97-39. *Military Attrition: DOD Could Save Millions by Better Screening Enlisted Personnel*. Washington, D.C. (January, 1997), 2.

<sup>2</sup> GAO Report to Congress, 98-58. *Military Recruiting: DOD Could Improve Its Recruiting Selection Improve Its Recruiter Selection and Incentive Systems*. Washington, D.C. (January, 1998), 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>4</sup> GAO Report to Congress 98-213. *Military Attrition: Better Data, Coupled With Policy Changes Could Help the Services Reduce Early Separations*. Washington, D.C. (September, 1998), 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> GAO 97-39, *Military Attrition/Better Screening*, 2.

## Chapter 2

### Air Force Attrition Data Review

*The “volunteer-in” military has to a great extent become a “volunteer-out one.”*

*Who Stays, Who Leaves? An Analysis of First Term Army Attrition, page 5*

The Air Force’s 48-month attrition rate from FY 82-FY93 averaged 27.4 percent, lower than the other services, but the only rate that steadily climbed during this period (Figure 2, Appendix A).<sup>1</sup> Attrition statistics and analysis for the Air Force are limited. The GAO issued 3 reports on the subject in the past 2 years; the RAND Corporation has been studying attrition on behalf of a concerned U.S. Army since 1979; the Defense Manpower Data Center provides attrition data, although it is limited in scope. These are the only three sources for attrition data.

Attrition data is best analyzed when viewing it three ways: recruit characteristics and the entire 48-month enlistment, enlistment Phase I or the period between the “shipping out” date until the end of the 6 month of service, and finally enlistment Phase II, the period between months 7 and 48. Unfortunately, due to a general lack of data, this study does not study DEP attrition. After reviewing both recruit characteristics and Phase I and II data, we will discuss the problematic codes used on separation paperwork.

#### **Attrition Data: Recruit Characteristics**

This section will explain the connection between recruit characteristics and the likelihood of first term attrition. These links provide “themes” to label high-risk enlistees. To illuminate these

themes, the GAO issued a September 1998 report that covers, in depth, the 1993 cohort. Although at first glance the information appears dated, those entering in December 1993 had a 48-month commitment expiring in December 1997. Thus, the GAO analyzed the cohort in 1998.

### **The Characteristics**

**Age at Enlistment.** Age and attrition data from the 1993 cohort whose 48-month attrition was analyzed by the GAO is found in Figure 3, Appendix A. Based on this data, it appears that older recruits are less attrition prone. There is a 3 percent drop in attrition between 20 and 21 year olds and again with the 22-year-old group. Notable is that this phenomenon is associated only with the Air Force; in fact the Marines find exactly the opposite is true. This may speak to the differences in cultures and mission among services.<sup>2</sup>

**Education Level.** This data, also from the 1993 cohort, shows attrition by education level of enlistees (Figure 4, Appendix A). The data indicates that those with a GED are significantly more attrition prone (45.9 percent); this rate is 15 percent higher than those with a high school diploma (32.5 percent). Homeschooling data indicates an attrition rate of 38.5 percent, or 7 percent less than those with a GED; this is a possible area of opportunity for recruiters, as is discussed later.<sup>3</sup> In FY 98, 99 percent of the new AF recruits had high school diplomas.<sup>4</sup> According to DOD and the services, the most important variable in managing attrition is educational attainment.<sup>5</sup>

Another analysis takes place among those who enlist with some college attendance. Data from the DMDC shows that the 36-month Air Force attrition rate for enlistees with one semester of college was 19.9 percent and with 2 or more years of college, just 16.8 percent.<sup>6</sup> This is unique to the Air Force; other services indicate attrition rates as high as 45.8 percent for the same group. Again, take the service's culture and mission into consideration when using this predictor.

**Gender.** The 1993 cohort showed in the first term, the female attrition rate was a significant 7 percent higher than male colleagues (Figure 5, Appendix A).<sup>7</sup> A recent article discussed the increasing number of college-bound women and male propensity not to attend; it stated that young men prefer to enter high paying, technical jobs and that the trend will continue for ten years.<sup>8</sup> The USAF should start targeting this market segment now. In FY 98, 26 percent of new recruits were women, an all time high.<sup>9</sup> The USAF should track FY 98 attrition rates for impact.

**AFQT Scores.** The higher the AFQT category and score, the less likely a member will depart early. As seen in Figure 6, Appendix A, AFQT testers who scored highest, labeled as Cat I, had a 25 percent attrition rate. There is a 4 percent increase for Cat II, another 4 percent increase in Cat IIIA, and then a jump 6 percent to 39.1 percent attrition for Cat IIIB, the lowest scorers.<sup>10</sup> Fortunately, the Air Force attracts quality recruits; in FY 98, 78 percent of recruits scored above 65 percent placing them in either Cat I or II.<sup>11</sup>

**Race.** Figure 6, Appendix A, shows that race is a factor in attrition. Minority recruits are less likely to attrit; black males have 1 percent less attrition than white males and attrition is far lower among those in the Hispanic and Asian ethnic groups.<sup>12</sup>

**Desire to Further Education.** A study done in 1986 showed that among enlistees, there is almost a 3 percent less overall attrition rate for those that want to further their education.<sup>13</sup> A 1995 RAND study for the Army showed that men had a 3 percent<sup>14</sup> and women had a 4 percent<sup>15</sup> lower attrition rate if they desired more education.

**Employment Background.** Little attention is paid to this predictor, although prior employment and number of jobs held may be a high risk factor for attrition. A 1984 RAND study illustrated the effect of employment on Air Force attrition (Figure 8, Appendix A).<sup>16</sup> A follow up study in 1995 showed that a spell of unemployment in the year before enlisting increased



attrition rates by 2.2 percent.<sup>17</sup> In addition, recruits who changed jobs several times before enlistment had a 3 percent higher attrition rate. These enlistees may have trouble with job matching; they may persistently make bad matches either by a lack of knowledge about their own desires and abilities or the lack of information before assuming the position.<sup>18</sup>

**Air Force Career Field.** I have plotted the top 15 career areas with respect to 48-month attrition for the 1993 cohort (see figures 9 and 10, Appendix A).<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note that these Air Force Specialty Codes are some of the least likely to deploy; therefore, there is probably little or no correlation between operations tempo and attrition.

**DEP.** A RAND study showed that DEP participants had a 1.7 percent less attrition rate than those that shipped out immediately.<sup>20</sup> Management of the DEP and the impact recruiters have on new recruits at this vulnerable time could significantly affect attrition.

### **Attrition Data: Enlistment Phase I**

Phase I is the period of enlistment from “shipping out” to BMT until the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of enlistment. By this time, most recruits have completed BMT and technical training. If an attrition loss occurs, the enlistee’s separation is categorized as “entry level” until the end of the sixth month; therefore, this timeframe is generally viewed as a recruit’s probationary period.

#### **Data Review**

The data used to analyze Phase I is from the FY 1994 cohort; in that year, DOD recruited more than 176,000 recruits of which more than 25,000 were separated by the 6 month point in their contracts. As seen in figure 2, Appendix A, the Air Force’s 6 month attrition rate makes up about a third of all attrition.<sup>21</sup> The GAO provided the following data; it shows how the AF lost

over \$46 million on attrition before the end of the sixth month of service. As stated before, this constitutes most of the attrition cost to the Air Force in a given year.<sup>22</sup>

**Table 1. Investment per Enlistee and Total 0-6 Month Attrition Cost**

Accessions	# attrited by 2 months	\$ Investment per enlistee at 2 months	# attrited between 3-6 months	\$ Investment in enlistee by 6 months	Total FY 94 0-6 month attrition cost
29,760	2,585	9,360	859	25,672	46,247,848

Data from GAO January 1997 Study “Military Attrition”, page 19.

It is difficult to isolate Phase I attrition reasons; the only means for analysis are the codes found on the DD Form 214, the separation form. The GAO calls DOD’s “inconsistent and incomplete”; I will cover this issue later in the chapter.<sup>23</sup>

Using DD 214 data and interviews with 100 separating recruits, the GAO estimates that about 83 percent of Phase I separations were attributed to DOD’s poor screening processes which do not identify those unqualified for service.<sup>24</sup> There are three main areas of concern discovered by analyzing the military’s FY 94 cohort: medical conditions, drug use and failure to meet standards.<sup>25</sup> We will not address drug use; unlike the other services, USAF does drug testing at the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS), not BMT, weeding out recruits prior to entry in DEP. Testing is not repeated at BMT.<sup>26</sup>

**Medical Conditions.** Of the 3,444 AF enlistees separated in the first 6 months, 41 percent, or 1,400 separations were due to medical conditions. According to the GAO, the services enlist people with disqualifying medical conditions 2 primary ways: (1) applicants conceal their medical histories and (2) services waive medical conditions that are disqualifying.<sup>27</sup>

On the issue of concealment, MEPCOM data shows it accounts for over half of all separations in this category. Currently, recruits only have to provide their medical records if they divulge past problems and they are not required to provide information on either their providers or insurance companies. Therefore, the military goes on the word of the recruit, who in their zeal for enlisting may not be fully truthful when answering questions. The only service to seek extra data in this area is the Navy. They studied medical separations and found that 55 percent of the attrited recruits said they told their recruiters of the conditions before enlisting and 41 percent said the recruiters told them not to mention it.<sup>28</sup> Screening at the MEPS is also in question; BMT doctors told GAO investigators about recruits with glass eyes and hearing aids.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the MEPS does not conduct the same tests done at BMT, for example Hepatitis B.<sup>30</sup>

Another area of concern is medical waivers. MEPCOM data for FY 94 showed that close to 8 percent of medical separations occurring on active duty were for the very reasons a waiver was granted in the recruitment phase. Criteria for waivers are ambiguous and ever changing.

**Failure to Meet Performance Standards.** Of the 3,444 separations in the first 6 months, 17.5 percent, or 600 fell into this category for the FY 94 cohort.<sup>31</sup> The GAO cites two areas of concerns: recruits are not physically prepared for BMT and they lack motivation.

The Air Force asks recruits to become physically fit during DEP, yet does not run a fitness program to prepare recruits for BMT. The Navy, Marines and the Army recently restructured their DEP to allow recruits access to military physical fitness centers; they also offer retirement points for participating in voluntary fitness training. These points count toward retirement eligibility if the soldier transfers to the reserves later. All services stop short of making fitness training mandatory due to fears of injury and service liability.<sup>32</sup>

Lack of motivation is a byproduct of BMT philosophies and recruit motivation techniques. The Air Force has attempted great strides in this area; the GAO reports that a senior Air Force official wrote in June 1995 that the “negative, profane and perhaps even abusive drill sergeant is all but gone. [In 1992], almost 10 percent of out trainees complained of verbal abuse or profanity. Today it’s 4.1 percent.” Unfortunately, in 1997, the GAO interviewed 126 recruits and one-third said they were subjected to humiliating treatment and it contributed to their desire to leave the military.<sup>33</sup> This area still requires attention; it is certainly tied to the issue of attrition.

### **Attrition Data: Enlistment Phase II**

Phase II is the period from 7 months until 48 months, the typical end of the first term of enlistment. To evaluate attrition in Phase II, we will use the GAO’s study on the FY 93 cohort. The GAO not only analyzed DD 214 data, but also spoke with 110 first term enlistees about to be separated, another 144 who planned to finish their terms, 41 personnel in their second or subsequent terms, and 41 supervisors of first term enlistees.

#### **Data Review.**

The Air Force 48-month attrition rate in FY 93 was 32.5 percent. The Air Force brought in 29,760 recruits and we have already discussed the 3,444, or 11.6 percent that were lost in the first 6 months. Phase II will address the 6,228 that were lost from months 7 and 48, or 20.9 percent of the total attrition. Phase II constitutes the bulk of attrition from a manpower perspective; the financial loss is reduced return on the recruiting and training investment.

It is important to note that the overall attrition rates do not include losses that are part of service’s early release programs, often used for force shaping. The Air Force released 1,102

personnel from the FY 93 cohort anywhere from 13 months to 90 days early; if added to the Air Force's overall attrition rate for FY 93, it climbs from 32.5 percent to 36 percent.

Unlike attrition before the six-month point, the reasons for attrition between 7 and 48 months are gender specific; we will therefore analyze the data accordingly.

### **Attrition Rate for Men**

The overall Phase II attrition rate for USAF men in the FY 93 cohort was 31 percent.<sup>34</sup>

Appendix A, Figure 12 shows percentages for all attrition areas; we will focus on the top four.

1. Misconduct: 38.6 percent.
2. Miscellaneous: 31.4 percent
3. Performance Problems: 7.3 percent, mostly due to failed Career Development Course (CDCs); GAO found that commanders do not use the retraining alternative enough.<sup>35</sup>
4. Medical Problems: 5 percent; far less than other services, probably due to mission.<sup>36</sup>

We will discuss the top 2 areas starting with misconduct. Clearly there are offenses and patterns of misconduct that lead a commander to pursue separation, but the GAO found that 12 percent, or 747 men and women, in the FY 93 cohort were separated for "minor disciplinary offenses."<sup>37</sup> GAO believes there is room for more rehabilitation instead of separation.<sup>38</sup>

We must address the miscellaneous separation category. Air Force Instruction 36-3208, Table 1.4 lists reasons an airman may request a miscellaneous separation: to further education, for pregnancy, to serve with the Reserve or the Guard, and a "miscellaneous reasons" category that would include financial or family hardship. The Wing Commander is the approval authority for all requests.<sup>39</sup> In a May 11, 1998 memo to Air Force commanders, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel wrote "Every officer, airman, NCO and senior NCO should plan on serving their entire service obligation." He outlined the program for FY 99 which eliminated any drawdown early release programs; enforced a 6 month application lead time for separations; and stated that Palace Chase separations, in which members serve the remainder of their time in the reserves,

would only be granted if active duty manning allowed. He asked commanders to do everything possible to keep first term airman from leaving early; regrettably, there was no further instruction on how or in what cases to carry out his direction.<sup>40</sup>

### **Attrition Rate for Women**

The overall attrition rate for Air Force women in the FY 93 cohort was 38 percent including pregnancy separations and 31 percent (equaling the men's rate) excluding pregnancy separations.<sup>41</sup> Figure 13 at Appendix A shows all attrition areas; we will focus on the top four.<sup>42</sup>

1. Pregnancy: 26.3 percent.
2. Miscellaneous: 23 percent.
3. Misconduct: 16.9 percent.
4. Medical Problems: 8.4 percent.

Pregnancy separations are a topic for further discussion. The service's policies differ; the Army and the Air Force allow pregnant women to separate at their discretion on request; it is automatic and voluntary. The Marine Corps and the Navy put the approval authority in the hands of the local commander because "enlistees represent a recruiting and training investment."<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, there is no data explaining why women ask for the separation.

### **Separation Codes: Clouding the Picture?**

As mentioned earlier, when comparing and evaluating attrition data, a problem ensues with the DD Form 214, the "Certificate of Release of Discharge from Active Duty", or separation form. Specifically, there is a three digit Interservice Separation Code (ISC) placed on the form to indicate the reason for separation; the same codes are used by all services for comparison and tracking purposes. Amazingly, each service interprets the ISCs differently; for instance, if a recruit withholds medical information at enlistment that later causes a separation, the Air Force calls it a fraudulent enlistment. The Navy documents it as an erroneous enlistment and the Army

cites it as failure to meet medical standards.<sup>44</sup> A 1991 RAND group addressed the relationship of ISCs to actual separation reasons by going to the National Personnel Record Center and actually reading documentation in 275 records and comparing information to the ISC. They found that “ISCs do not accurately reflect the problems of circumstances leading to separation.” The form supports only one ISC; since there are usually a variety of reasons for the discharge, the ISC used is the one that provided the most defensible (legal) justification.<sup>45</sup>

### **Attrition Data Conclusions**

Research proves there are 9 attrition characteristics: age at enlistment, education level, gender, AFQT scores, race, desire to further education, employment background, selected career field and involvement in the DEP. From “shipping out” until the end of 6 months, preexisting medical conditions and failure to meet standards are the two major reasons for attrition and are due to poor recruiter screening. Between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> month, attrition reasons differ for men and women; they are governed by regulations and practices the services have the power to change. Next, I will cover recruiting issues and their potential impact on attrition.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> GAO 98-213, *Military Attrition/Early Separations*, 23.

<sup>2</sup> GAO 98-213, *Military Attrition/Early Separations*, 62.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>4</sup> Bryant Jordan. “On Recruiting, There’s Good News and Bad News.” *Air Force Times* 59, no.15 (November 11, 1998), 21.

<sup>5</sup> GAO 97-39, *Military Attrition/Better Screening*, 12 and Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy). *Educational Enlistment Standards: Recruiting Equity for GED Certificates*. (Washington, D.C. 1996), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). 1988–1995 12, 24 and 36-Month Attrition of Enlisted Personnel sorted by service, race and education.

<sup>7</sup> GAO 98-213, *Military Attrition/Early Separations*, 63.

<sup>8</sup> Brendan I. Koerner. “Where the Boys Aren’t.” *U.S. News and World Report* 126, no.5 (February 8, 1999), 49.

<sup>9</sup> Jordan, “On Recruiting, There’s Good News and Bad News”, 21.

## Notes

- <sup>10</sup> GAO 98-213, *Military Attrition/Early Separations*, 62.
- <sup>11</sup> Jordan, "On Recruiting, There's Good News and Bad News", 21.
- <sup>12</sup> GAO 98-213, *Military Attrition/Early Separations*, 63.
- <sup>13</sup> John Antel, *Military Enlistment and Attrition: An Analysis of Decision Reversal*. RAND Corporation Report R-3510-FMP. (California, 1987), 30.
- <sup>14</sup> Martin, *Who Stays, Who Leaves*, 51.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.
- <sup>16</sup> Richard J. Buddin. *Analysis of Early Military Attrition Behavior*. RAND Corporation Report R-3069-MIL. (California, 1984), 45.
- <sup>17</sup> Martin, *Who Stays, Who Leaves*, 50.
- <sup>18</sup> Buddin, *Analysis of Early Military Attrition Behavior*, 9.
- <sup>19</sup> GAO 98-213, *Military Attrition/Early Separations*, 64.
- <sup>20</sup> Buddin, *Analysis of Early Military Attrition Behavior*, 35.
- <sup>21</sup> GAO 97-39, *Military Attrition/Better Screening*, 11.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>25</sup> GAO 97-39, *Military Attrition/Better Screening*, 29.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.
- <sup>29</sup> William H. McMichael, "Military Failure Rate Blamed on Quotas, Poor Screening." *Newport News Daily Press* (January 23, 1997)
- <sup>30</sup> GAO 97-39, *Military Attrition/Better Screening*, 38.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.
- <sup>34</sup> GAO 98-213, *Military Attrition/Early Separations*, 32.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.
- <sup>39</sup> Air Force Instruction (AFI) 36-3208: *Administrative Separation of Airmen*, (October 14, 1994), 29.
- <sup>40</sup> Julie Bird. "Hey, Not So Fast! Air Force is Making it Harder to Leave the Service Early." *Air Force Times* 58, no.42 (May 25, 1998), 3.
- <sup>41</sup> GAO 98-213, *Military Attrition/Early Separations*, 32.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.
- <sup>44</sup> GAO 97-39, *Military Attrition/Better Screening*, 26.
- <sup>45</sup> Stephen Klein. *Why Recruits Separate Early*. RAND Corporation Report R-3980-FMP. (California, 1991), 34.



## Chapter 3

### Recruiting Issues

*Enlistment occurs if its expected utility exceeds that of schooling and work.*

*Antel, Military Enlistment and Attrition: An Analysis of Decision Reversal, 9.*

#### Current Recruiting Practices

Recruiting practices are an important piece in solving the attrition puzzle. Recruiting and retaining well-qualified military personnel is one of the goals in the DOD's strategic plan, as required by the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993. DOD has around 12,000 recruiters at 5,500 recruiting stations in the U.S. <sup>1</sup>

#### Assignment of Recruiters

The Air Force is one of the only services with an all-volunteer recruiter and is the only service to use current recruiters to screen potentials in a program called "Recruit the Recruiter."<sup>2</sup> The GAO states that USAF recruiters are more than twice as productive as other service recruiters; are more successful in meeting their goals; and have lower turnover rates due to 4 year vice 3 year tours held by sister service recruiters.<sup>3</sup> Overall, the USAF recruiter selection process is not a contributing factor to attrition.

#### Recruiter Training

Recruiter training takes place at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas, very near to BMT facilities. However, there is only one day in the curriculum for a visit to BMT facilities and little

to no interaction among new recruiters and BMT officials. A dialogue on reasons for BMT attrition would be extremely beneficial to both parties. In fact, attrition is not a part of the recruiter school curriculum.<sup>4</sup>

### **How Recruiting Goals Are Set**

The USAF has met its recruiting goals for the last 20 years. The Headquarters Air Force Director of Personnel office determines annual force requirements by category. Specific recruitment goals are established to fill these requirements and are communicated to Recruiting Services Operations which calculates and allocates monthly group goals; groups in turn establish squadron goals, squadrons establish flight goals.<sup>5</sup> Recruiters must feel incredible pressure to make their goals, whether system or self-induced; this may drive recruiters to enlist recruits they know do not meet criteria. Also, there is temptation for the service to use next year's DEP pool against this year's goals by bringing recruits on active duty early, which in turn makes the following recruiting year especially difficult. The USAF did use 1999 DEP recruits against their 1998 goal, depleting the DEP to its lowest levels in almost 20 years. The result is that 1999 goals have increased by 2,500; recruiters also have to overproduce by 2,000 in anticipation of low reenlistment rates.<sup>6</sup> The 1999 cohort provides an excellent opportunity to monitor attrition rates as they relate to goals and recruiter pressure.

The USAF tried quarterly goals for 3 months in 1991 but quit when recruiters fell behind.<sup>7</sup> The current goal system may contribute to attrition by not addressing either recruiter natural workload fluctuations or predictable seasonal vacillation of the recruit pool.

### **Recruiting a Potential Enlistee.**

DOD collects and consolidates lists of potential recruits for recruiters. This list is drawn from the American Student List, Department of Motor Vehicle records and records of students

who took the ASVAB at school. The list is valuable, but the distribution method is in question; the same list is mailed to every service recruiter in a geographical area. They then race each other to “cold call” people on the list; in 1995 it took 653 phone calls to perspective recruits to enlist one, up 163 calls from 1993 due to increased use of home answering machines.<sup>8</sup> This procedure ties up the recruiters for a phenomenal amount of time and may contribute to attrition. Recruiters need extra time and resources to pursue and convince high quality recruits join.

### **The Enlistment Process.**

The GAO’s January 1997 report best describes this process:

After a recruiter prescreens an applicant for military service, the applicant is sent to one of 65 MEPS located throughout the country. At the MEPS, which are under the direction of the Military Entrance Processing Command (MEPCOM), the applicant takes the ASVAB to determine whether he or she is qualified for enlistment and a military job specialty, and a medical examination is given to determine whether he or she meets physical entrance standards. After it has been determined that an applicant is qualified, the applicant is sworn in the service and enters the DEP. When an applicant enters the DEP, he or she becomes a member of the Individual Ready Reserve, in unpaid status, and waits being called to active duty. An individual may remain in DEP for up to 1 year. Just before reporting to the service basic training command, the new recruit returns to the MEPS, undergoes a brief physical examination and is sworn into active duty.<sup>9</sup>

One area omitted in this explanation is the waiver process; recruiters can seek a moral waiver for prior misconduct and a medical waiver for non-qualifying conditions.

For the USAF, the contact ends between recruiter and recruit after the official swearing in ceremony. However, Marine Corps recruiters stay in touch and counsel recruits as they go through BMT and technical school training; they have a different incentive system that inspires them to do so, as we will discuss in the next section.

## Recruiting Incentive Programs

### Extra Pay and Perks

USAF Recruiters are paid an extra \$375 per month. In a March 4, 1998 hearing on the Hill, recruiters told lawmakers that paying them more is not the answer to meeting recruiting goals.<sup>10</sup> This motivated group selects the recruiting career field and can turn down the job if they do not draw the area desired. Their tour is for 4 years, offering stability, and TDYs are limited.

### Individual Rewards

Individual awards mainly revolve around a system that gives points for various types of recruits. For example, high quality recruits equal eight points and low quality recruits equal five. If a reward such as a plaque requires 40 points, recruiters may bring in the easiest combination to still attain the goal. James Dertouzos, in his RAND study *Recruiter Incentives and Enlistment Supply* addresses the behavior of recruiters when meeting goals.<sup>11</sup> Other studies show that recruiters may focus on low quality recruits unless they have incentive to bring in the higher quality ones.<sup>12</sup> Overproduction awards, if not tied to quality, may increase attrition.

The Navy and Marine Corps give ten times the original point value of a recruit when he or she graduates from BMT, tying their system directly to attrition.<sup>13</sup> The USAF does have the BMT attrition award, a plaque given to a recruiter and a flight in each squadron that has the lowest BMT attrition in a FY.<sup>14</sup> No points are tied into further incentives such as medals that would affect promotions, however. The GAO stated that “Basic training officials from all services told us they believe that recruiters do not have adequate incentives to ensure that their recruits are qualified medically, morally, and psychologically.”<sup>15</sup> The GAO indicates that time off, is the biggest incentive a recruiter could receive. Time off is not a part of the USAF incentive program, although the Marine Corps does incorporate a 4 day pass in their system.<sup>16</sup>

## **Pool and Propensity of Potential Recruits**

Recruiting is the conversion of potential supply into assets. The pool of potential recruits and their propensity to serve are two critical recruiting factors that relate to the study of attrition. Figure 14, Attachment 1, offers a conceptual view of the enlistment process.

A 1996 RAND study shows that the predicted supply of high quality recruits is high but propensity to enlist is down.<sup>17</sup>

### **Pool of Potential Recruits**

Studies show that the pool of potential high quality enlistees has increased since the drawdown and is sufficient to meet our needs.<sup>18</sup> One of their studies showed that there has been little change in recruiter access to high school students, but a steady decline in the rate of contact with high schoolers and less ASVAB testing. Why can't we tap this large supply of potential recruits? RAND says the reduced number of recruiters and stations from the drawdown and the base closure process may have alienated portions of the population from the military.<sup>19</sup> Another reason could be lowering propensity, as we will discuss next.

### **Propensity of Potential Recruits**

The annual Youth Attitude Tracking Survey done by DOD tracks propensity, which has a strong correlation to actual enlistments. YAT data shows that the inclination of male Americans ages 16 through 21 to join any military service dropped from 34 percent to 26 percent from 1991 to 1997. Furthermore, the propensity for this same group to join the USAF declined from 16 percent to 12 percent over the same period. Female propensity to join the USAF also declined: from 9 to 6 percent. A few theories on low propensity: the Gulf conflict showed the danger of being a servicemember; we are enjoying robust economy; the number of veterans has declined and they are upset over benefit erosion; and Generation X does not trust large institutions.<sup>20</sup>

Some items that do not affect propensity: a 1996 RAND study found that there is no evidence that counsel provided by parents or friends has become more negative over the years.<sup>21</sup> A DOD survey showed school counselor's advice on military service has remained constant.<sup>22</sup>

### **Recruiter Complaints**

Quality of life for recruiters is going down hill. In a 1996 DOD survey, 63 percent of recruiters reported working 60 or more hours per week. The GAO interviewed 35 experienced recruiters with a total of 280 years of experience for more insight. One observation is that time off is the biggest incentive a recruiter ever gets, yet is rarely offered. DOD survey results showed that 68 percent of recruiters had not taken leave in the previous year. Requests to close all recruiting offices for a two-week period over the Christmas season are unanswered. In 1996, the recruiter's two biggest concerns were their monthly goals and working hours.<sup>23</sup>

Attrition is starting to concern recruiters. A panel testified to Congress in March 4, 1998, that attrition is making their job harder and that it is too easy for recruits to get out.<sup>24</sup> Career field manning is low; enlisted recruiter manning hovers around 80 and 85 percent. In a 7 October 1998 news release to recruiters, General Lloyd Newton stated that "we are still short by 200 recruiters."<sup>25</sup> The low manning increases goals for recruiters already stressed by a tough market.

### **Recruiting Issues Conclusions**

The quality and pay of recruiters is not related to attrition. Two areas that do keep recruiters from spending the time necessary to bring in high quality recruits: monthly goals that do not allow the recruiter to manage time most effectively and time spent "cold calling" and canvassing for interest. Recruiters have little incentive to prevent attrition other than a plaque. The pool of recruits is high, but propensity is falling, placing the services in the awkward position of

choosing between lowering quality and not meeting goals. Finally, recruiter dissatisfaction and stress levels are high. Therefore, recruiting issues directly affect attrition rates.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> GAO 98-58, *Military Recruiting*, 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-20.

<sup>5</sup> Carol Oken. *Encouraging Recruiter Achievement: A Recent History of Recruiter Incentive Programs*. RAND Corporation Report MR-845-OSD/A. (California, 1997), 36.

<sup>6</sup> Jordan, *On Recruiting, There's Good News and Bad News*, 21.

<sup>7</sup> GAO 98-58, *Military Recruiting*, 37.

<sup>8</sup> James R. Thomas, *Reengineering DOD Recruiting*. RAND Corporation Report IP-165. California, 1997, 2.

<sup>9</sup> GAO 97-39, *Military Attrition/Better Screening*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Rick Maze. "Recruiters: It's Too Easy for People to Get Out." *Air Force Times* 58, no. 32 (March 16, 1998), 4.

<sup>11</sup> Dertouzos, James N. *Recruiter Incentives and Enlistment Supply*. RAND Corporation Report R-3065-MIL. (California, 1985), 10-26.

<sup>12</sup> Beth Asch. *Recent Recruiting Trends and Their Implications: Preliminary Analysis and Recommendation*. RAND Corporation Report MR-549-A/OSD. (California, 1994), 23.

<sup>13</sup> GAO 98-58, *Military Recruiting*, 29.

<sup>14</sup> Air Education and Training Command Instruction 36-2804: *Recruiting Service Incentive Awards Program*, (November 6, 1998), 12.

<sup>15</sup> GAO 97-39, *Military Attrition/Better Screening*, 31.

<sup>16</sup> GAO 98-58, *Military Recruiting*, 34.

<sup>17</sup> Bruce Orvis. *Military Recruiting Outlook: Recent Trends in Enlistment Propensity and Conversion of Potential Enlisted Supply*. RAND Corporation Report MR-677-A/OSD. (California, 1996), 18.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>20</sup> Wilson, George C. "The All Volunteer Force is in Danger." *Air Force Times* 58, no. 36 (April 13, 1998), 62.

<sup>21</sup> Orvis, *Military Recruiting Outlook*, 18.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>23</sup> GAO 98-58, *Military Recruiting*, 33-34.

<sup>24</sup> Maze, "Recruiters: It's Too Easy for People to Get Out", 4.

<sup>25</sup> Gen Lloyd W. Newton. "Recruiting: Your Goal is One." Air Education and Training Command News Release reprinted by Air Force News, October 7, 1998

## Chapter 5

### The Air Force's Attrition Reduction Efforts

*Enlistment occurs only if both the individual and the military want to enter the contract.*

*Antel, Military Enlistment and Attrition: An Analysis of Decision Reversal, 4.*

*Attrition occurs only if the military breaks the contract.*

The Author

#### Reduction Goal

The GAO reported in September 1998 that the USAF's target is to reduce first-term attrition from 32.5 percent to 27 percent. The service hopes to reduce FY 97 cohort attrition at BMT from 11 percent to 7 percent and post BMT attrition from 25 percent to 20 percent.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the GAO reports the USAF cut their FY 97 budget in anticipation of meeting attrition reduction goals.<sup>2</sup>

As part of the BMT attrition reduction plan, the USAF slowed physical training down in order to give recruits a chance to break in their combat boots. Officials reported that the attrition rates dropped at BMT, but they did not know if the boot issue was responsible.<sup>3</sup>

Another area the USAF targeted was miscellaneous separations. As stated earlier, the AF/DP sent correspondence to AF commanders asking them to take a hard look at requests for miscellaneous separation. In its September 1998 reports, the GAO criticized the USAF's efforts, though, stating that other than this memo, there was no other guidance to commanders on how to



reduce attrition. In addition, they criticized the lack of guidance to commanders on screening miscellaneous requests or ways to retain people who want to separate. They go on to state: “While setting such numeric targets sends a clear and positive message to USAF commanders about the importance of lowering attrition, USAF officials provided us with no evidence that commanders had been asked to document what actions they take that are successful. Such documentation would allow the USAF to apply successful methods to other units.”<sup>4</sup>

The USAF Personnel Center (AFPC) started collecting miscellaneous separation data from the Military Personnel Flights (MPF) in February. Also, the Secretary of Defense’s Personnel and Readiness office started collecting monthly attrition data from the services in February. These are two steps that will allow more visibility into the statistics and trend data collection, but there is no coordinated reduction plan.

The GAO believes that “the services’ current goals for reducing attrition are arbitrary.” They go on to warn: “The danger of setting arbitrary goals is that these goals can become “attrition ceilings,” which can result in the inadvertent retention of lower quality recruits.” The GAO also thinks congressional concern over attrition levels will drive the services to control attrition rather than manage it, resulting in an equally serious problem with poor quality. They assert that before DOD can effectively manage attrition, it must have adequate data which, as stated before, the GAO contends is not now available.<sup>5</sup> Finally, they state that attrition reduction must be linked to clear policy changes that affect the group the service is trying to retain.<sup>6</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> GAO 98-213, *Military Attrition/Early Separations*, 52.

<sup>2</sup> GAO 97-39, *Military Attrition/Better Screening*, 19.

<sup>3</sup> Maze, “Recruiters: It’s Too Easy for People to Get Out”, 4.

<sup>4</sup> GAO 98-213, *Military Attrition/Early Separations*, 52.

<sup>5</sup> GAO 97-39, *Military Attrition/Better Screening*, 2, 4, 23-24.

<sup>6</sup> GAO 98-213, *Military Attrition/Early Separations*, 58.

## Chapter 6

### Proposed FY00 Attrition Reduction Plan

*Enlistment involves leaving civilian life for the military. Attrition means leaving the military for civilian life.*

*Antel, Military Enlistment and Attrition: An Analysis of Decision Reversal, 3.*

This attrition reduction plan offers Air Force recruiting and personnel officials a place to start for FY 00. I will propose using recruit characteristics as attrition markers, revamping recruiting policies, and updating a few systems already in place. Finally, I will propose policy changes that will lower attrition rates throughout the entire first term of enlistment.

#### Recruit Characteristics as Attrition Markers

Due to current DOD recruiting policy, we can not use the attrition predictors to select recruits, but we can identify high risk recruits and offer assistance to keep them in uniform.

#### Recruiter Screening Tools

We proved that nine areas are directly related to attrition: age at enlistment, education level, gender, AFQT scores, race, desire to further education, employment background, selected career field and involvement in the DEP. The recruiter can use these markers to calculate a whole person score, indicating high or low attrition risk. Those with a high score would receive targeted counseling the whole way through their first term. The Navy tried a Compensatory Screening model and enjoyed a 4% reduction in attrition in 1993; we should piggyback on their efforts.<sup>1</sup>

Perception of the program by recruits should not be of concern; it is a management tool to help us provide targeted counseling so enlistees can succeed. We could use an unobtrusive name such as “Blue Four”, the name that pilots give to their young, inexperienced wingman. Another idea is to revise the category I-IIIB system, including attrition factors in the calculation.

### **Education Program Changes**

The Air Force seems to attract a segment of the population that thirsts for more education. Nevertheless, Air Force education offerings pale in comparison to other services, particularly the Army. Two of their programs deserve consideration: the Army College Fund (ACF), the service supplement to the G.I. Bill. Recruits who score in the top 50 percent on their placement test and fill one of 94 designated career fields are eligible. A 2-year enlistment equals \$26,500, a 3-year enlistment reaps \$33,000 and a 4-year enlistment offers \$40,000.<sup>2</sup> Another Army program is CONAP, a program that allows enlistees who are postponing school for financial reasons to enlist. Participating schools help the member collect credits while serving.<sup>3</sup>

The home-schooled population of 750,000 to 1 million offers opportunities: it is widely thought that military families constitute a large portion of this group. We must collect data on why these enlistees have a high rate of attrition and feed this information back to the homes through the military population, home schooling associations and churches.

### **Phase I: Reducing Attrition in the Accession to 6<sup>th</sup> Month Period by Revamping the Recruiting System**

A few changes to the USAF’s recruiting system will help lower attrition rates by allowing and encouraging recruiters to focus on the high quality, low attrition risk recruit and attain goals in the most efficient manner. Also, certain recruiter programs and personalized contact with recruits prior to enlistment will lower Phase I attrition.

### **Institute Recruiter Attrition Training**

The Marines spend 7 days at their recruiter school talking about attrition, yet the USAF spends none. If we want to lower Phase I attrition, we need educated recruiters.<sup>4</sup>

### **Improve Recruiter Manning.**

As we discussed, recruiter manning is already low, contributing to the attrition problem. A RAND study showed that a 10 percent increase in the number of recruiters would result in a greater than 15 percent rise in high quality enlistments.<sup>5</sup> Rather than increasing the recruiter career field by taking non-volunteers or robbing other career fields, we need to tap into the richest recruiting resource available – active duty members. For example, high schools often enjoy hosting alumni while home on leave. Using alumni is an unobtrusive way to increase the amount of contact with perspective recruits. General Newton encouraged this in his October 7, 1998 speech<sup>6</sup> but we must institutionalize it for success. I recommend the Recruiting Service issue user-friendly instructions for a contact program and the AF/DP place it in Mission Support Squadrons (MSS) for oversight. The MSS already performs human resource functions and this program should not result in added manpower. It is time to emphasize stewardship in the USAF and make everyone responsible for recruiting quality individuals.

### **Transform Recruiters into Job Counselors and Placement Officers**

Due to misuse of time and resources, recruiters can not fulfill an essential role: making a personalized contract between the company and the recruit. Their emphasis should be more as a human resources expert than a headhunter. As mentioned previously, attrition is a “bad match”; the recruiter should work to make it a good match. There are also excellent job matching models already in existence and ready for their use, if they only had the time.<sup>7</sup>

**Go High Tech.** [www.airforce.com](http://www.airforce.com) is an impressive, high tech recruiting site that proves we are learning to exploit the Internet. The USAF used an innovative approach on October 8, 1998, in an on-line forum with recruiters and 700 potential recruits.<sup>8</sup> Recruiters used to canvass the malls and movie theaters; they need to go where the kids are in 1999 – at home, surfing the web on their computer. Expanding these programs could reduce workload for the line recruiters.

**Contract out?** The Senate’s 1999 Defense Authorization Bill calls for the DOD to design a pilot program testing the privatization of recruiting. Telemarketing would be used to identify an interested person, freeing up recruiters to concentrate on the selling and job counseling portion of recruitment.<sup>9</sup> RAND gives details in a 1998 paper “Reengineering DOD Recruiting.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Recruiting Goals Revamped**

The GAO recommends the floating goal system called “heroes and zeros.”<sup>11</sup> The USAF should try this program again and this time, not panic and cancel it after just 3 months if the numbers are low. Our military environment consistently overlooks that change takes time; this system could yield more productive recruiters, higher quality recruits, and lower attrition rates.

### **Recruiter Incentive Changes**

The USAF must tie recruiter incentives to the number of recruits that make it through the first 6 months: in other words, put the focus on quality versus quantity. I suggest more than a plaque – give them what they want: time off! I suggest modeling the program after the Marines’, which is already in place. The GAO suggests we reward recruiters for weeding out poor quality; it gives them “partial credit” for fully screening as opposed to no credit and “wasted time.”<sup>12</sup>

## **DEP Issues**

**Length.** As illuminated before, length of time spent in the DEP leads to 1.7 percent lower attrition rate after enlistment. However, more time in the DEP gives the recruit longer to ponder their decision, possibly leading to contract cancellation. The Navy and Marine Corps appreciate this and have minimum and optimum DEP time targets.<sup>13</sup> The USAF should follow suit.

**DEP Management.** The GAO believes DEP management and retention are related.<sup>14</sup> The data proved the amount of involvement among recruits and recruiters during DEP lowers attrition. Monthly DEP meetings should be mandatory with agendas that prepare recruits for BMT. After revamping the DEPs, a review of the Marine's unit cohesion program is a must; recruits stay together in groups of 2-13 from the DEP through BMT, tech school and to their first duty station. This approach encourages recruits to help pull each other through.<sup>15</sup>

## **Physical Fitness**

The GAO recommends that recruits pass a physical fitness test before they report to basic training, as is currently done by the Marines.<sup>16</sup> If DOD implements this, the onus will be on recruiters to prepare recruits for the test. Both the Army<sup>17</sup> and Marines<sup>18</sup> have excellent physical fitness programs in their DEP that the USAF could benchmark. A program that requires little administrative effort and emphasizes personal responsibility is one that I implemented in the 48<sup>th</sup> Mission Support Squadron while the commander. The program, done on the honor system, gives points for physical activities done in a specific amount of time for aerobic fitness. A weekly activity log is kept and monthly rewards given. On the issue of combat boots, I suggest they be issued at the DEP, not BMT, for a longer break in period; if a recruit quits they return the boots or pay.

## **Medical Screening**

Medical records, provider and insurance data must go to the MEPS for review so they can see the recruit's entire medical picture. In addition, the GAO wants the MEPS to match tests with what is given at BMT.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, we should explore as a service whether every member must meet the same medical standards or if we can tailor medical eligibility to career field.

## **Phase II – Reducing Attrition in the 7-48 Month Enlistment Period**

### **Separation Codes and Data Collection Improvements**

Codes are standardized, but not explained well. I recommend the USAF give better training and guidance to personnelists at tech school and during on-the-job training regarding the use of the codes to at least give the Air Force better attrition data integrity. An expanded table in AFI 36-2002 would also be helpful as would interservice training on code management.

### **Exit Surveys**

As stated previously, the DD 214 does not always exactly match the reasons for separation. Exit surveys done by the member, similar to those done in the business world would collect attrition trend data. I recommend that Military Modernization computer efforts which let MPFs share data with AFPC expand to include exit surveys for those separating and a field for expanded separation information for the personnelist filling out the DD 214.

### **Using Available Models**

There are several excellent military attrition prediction models already available. They can be manipulated to fit any data set and predict the enlistment potential of the market, identify and screen attrition-prone recruits, and predict cohort attrition for better force management.<sup>20</sup>

## **Policy Changes**

Attrition rate depends on service policies, not only the composition of enlistees.<sup>21</sup>

### **Revisit Pregnancy Separations**

It is time to rethink the policy that allows expecting women to automatically separate upon request. Pregnancy is not a barrier to performing most USAF jobs and the condition is temporary. If the decision is left to the commander, he can evaluate the situation and determine if separation is in the best interests of the individual and the USAF. More data is the key; it would isolate why women want to separate and which policy changes would retain them.

### **More Cross Training Opportunities for CDC Failures**

We should allow the commander more cross training options for CDC failures unless there is another issue like misconduct.<sup>22</sup>

### **Scrutinize Misconduct Separations for Potential Rehabilitation and Retention**

Issue instructions to commanders to ensure that where possible and desirable, rehabilitative efforts are undertaken prior to separation for minor infractions. Also, keep the pressure on Congress to allow improved background checks on recruits.<sup>23</sup>

### **Do Away with Reenlistments: Make Everyone Indefinite**

This concept is under consideration in relation to the retention problem, but it affects attrition as well. Reenlistment gives pause to think; with the impending end of the enlistment period, those separating start job hunting and applying for college. Often a member will secure a job or class start date that requires early separation; these requests, made under the miscellaneous separation program, force the commander to either support the individual or act in the best interests of the Air Force. Without a reenlistment date, perhaps the number of miscellaneous



requests would lower significantly. Enlisted members would still have active duty service commitments for PCSing, technical training and other TDYs, similar to the program currently in place for our officer corps.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> OASD, *Educational Enlistment Standards: Recruiting Equity for GED Certificates*, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Tice. "New Initiatives in Recruiting." *Army Times* 57, no.34 (March 17, 1997), 34.

<sup>3</sup> Oken, *Encouraging Recruiter Achievement*, 16.

<sup>4</sup> GAO 98-58, *Military Recruiting*, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Dertouzos, *Recruiter Incentives and Enlistment Supply*, 23.

<sup>6</sup> Newton, *Recruiting: Your Goal is One*.

<sup>7</sup> Antel, *Military Enlistment and Attrition*, 4 and Buddin, *Analysis of Early Military Attrition Behavior*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Palmer. "Taking Recruiting to the Internet." *Air Force Times* 59, no. 11 (October 19, 1998): 6

<sup>9</sup> Lisa Daniel. "Lawmakers Want to Test Private Recruiters." *Air Force Times* 58, no. 45 (June 15, 1998), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas, *Reengineering DoD Recruiting*.

<sup>11</sup> GAO 97-39, *Military Attrition/Better Screening*, 32.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>13</sup> GAO 98-58, *Military Recruiting*, 25.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>15</sup> GAO 98-213, *Military Attrition/Early Separations*, 53.

<sup>16</sup> GAO 98-58, *Military Recruiting*, 27.

<sup>17</sup> Klein, *Why Recruits Separate Early*, 2.

<sup>18</sup> GAO 98-58, *Military Recruiting*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> GAO 97-39, *Military Attrition Better Screening*, 38.

<sup>20</sup> Antel, *Military Enlistment and Attrition*, V-viii and 38.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>22</sup> GAO 98-213, *Military Attrition/Early Separations*, 42-43.

<sup>23</sup> Rick Maze. "Recruiters: It's Too Easy for People to Get Out." *Air Force Times* 58, no. 32 (March 16, 1998), 4.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

The USAF is not the victim of attrition. We failed to address it over the years and it has become part of the culture, imbedded in the recruiting system and personnel policies. There will always be attrition; some recruits will fail to live up standards and their separation will be in the service's best interests. The bottom line is this: we will not know how much attrition is "good attrition" until we take some concerted action to lower the rates and stick with it for the long haul, perhaps 5-7 years.

This research proved that there are specific characteristics related to attrition; that recruiting issues have a significant impact; the USAF recruiting plan is setting arbitrary goals that may increase attrition and that some personnel policies may be aggravating the situation. Addressing these areas will reduce attrition and get the service on the road to recovery.

The work doesn't stop there; we need to start analyzing Outsourcing and Privatization efforts and their effect on recruiting; anticipate possible Congressional or OSD guidance to recruit jointly; and ponder whether Quality of Life survey data is tied not only to retention, but attrition as well.

The implications of this study are far reaching; attrition affects all of us regardless of career field or whether a commander, supervisor or co-worker. With concerted effort, FY 00 can be the year we finally address the issue with a positive and informed course of action.

## Appendix A

### Attrition Data

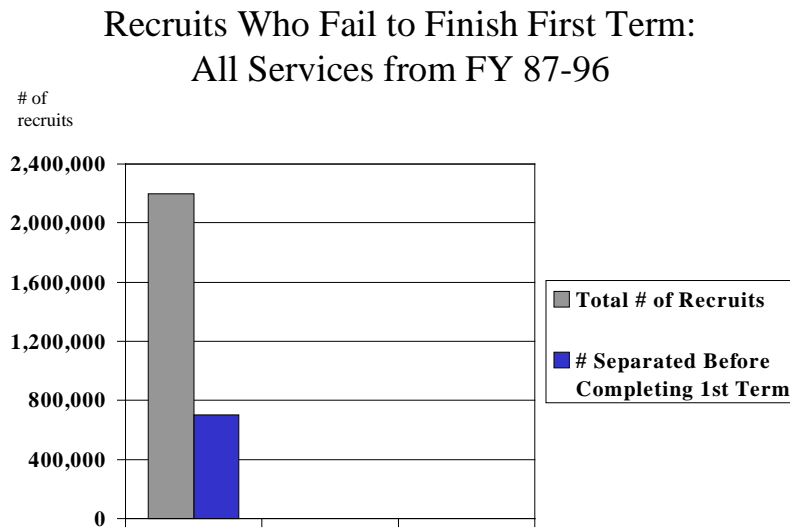
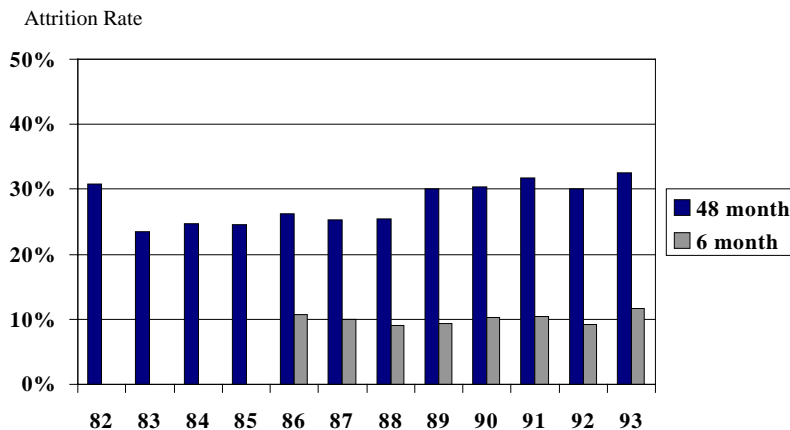


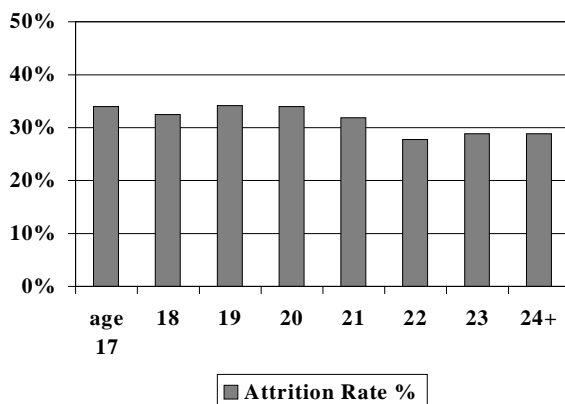
Figure 1. All DOD Recruits from FY 87-96 Who Failed to Finish Their First Term<sup>1</sup>

### Air Force 6 and 48 Month Attrition Rates: FY 82 to FY 93 Cohorts



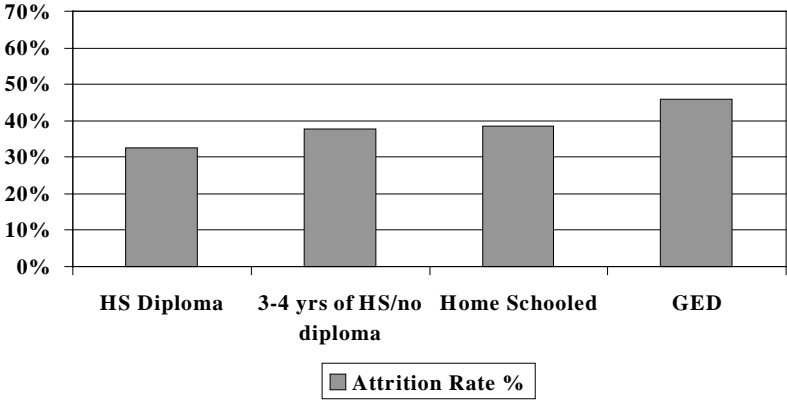
**Figure 2. Air Force 6 and 48-Month Attrition Rates from the FY 82-FY 93 Cohort<sup>2</sup>**

### Attrition Rate by Age at Enlistment



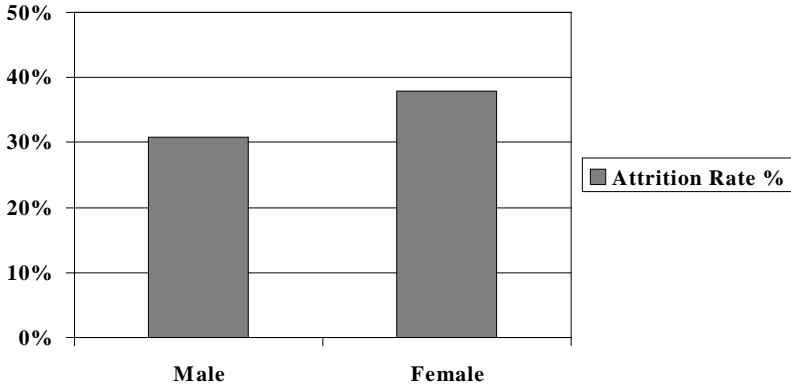
**Figure 3. Air Force 48-Month Attrition Rate by Age at Enlistment, FY 93 Cohort<sup>3</sup>**

### Attrition Rate by Education Level



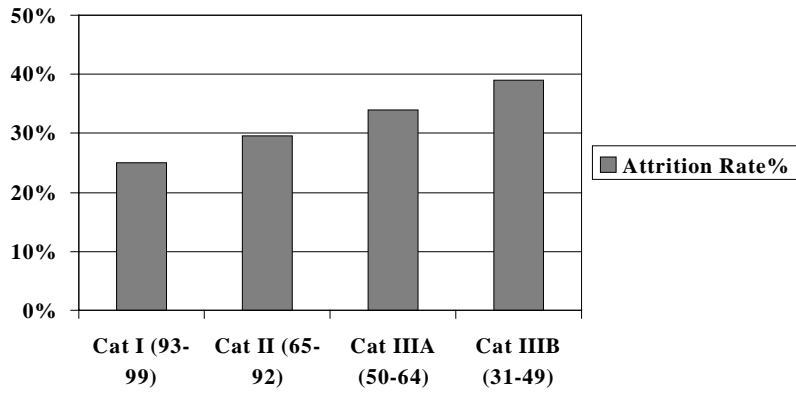
**Figure 4. Air Force 48-Month Attrition Rate by Education Level, FY 93 Cohort<sup>4</sup>**

### Attrition Rate by Gender



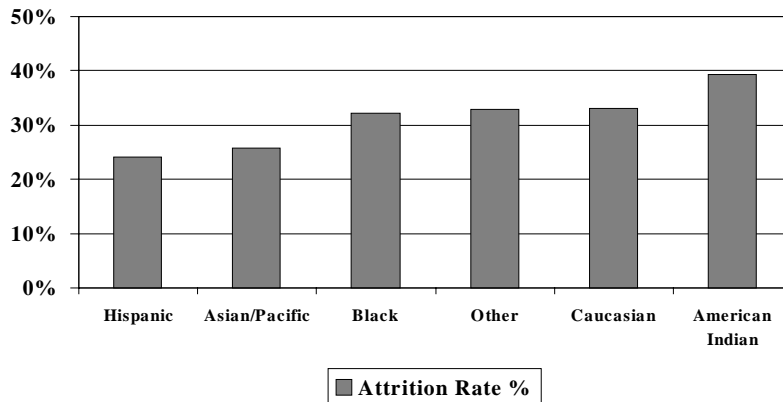
**Figure 5. Air Force 48-Month Attrition Rate by Gender, FY 93 Cohort<sup>5</sup>**

### Attrition by AFQT Test Score and Category



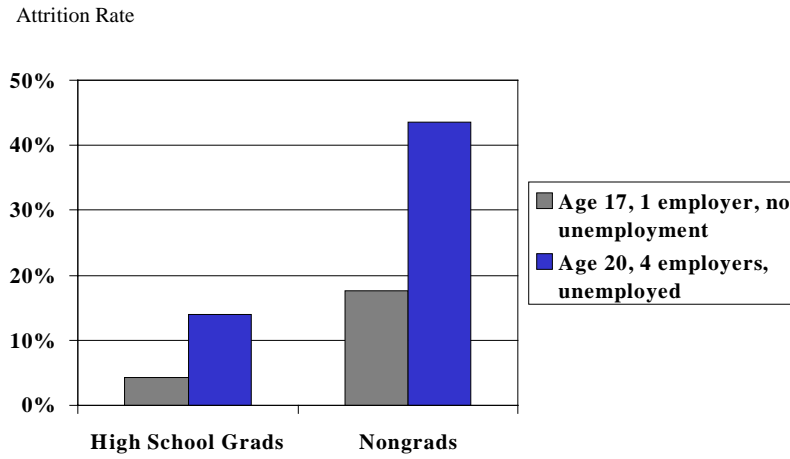
**Figure 6. Air Force 48-Month Attrition Rate by AFQT Test Score and Corresponding Category, FY 93 Cohort<sup>6</sup>**

### Attrition by Race



**Figure 7. Air Force 48-Month Attrition Rate by Race, FY 93 Cohort<sup>7</sup>**

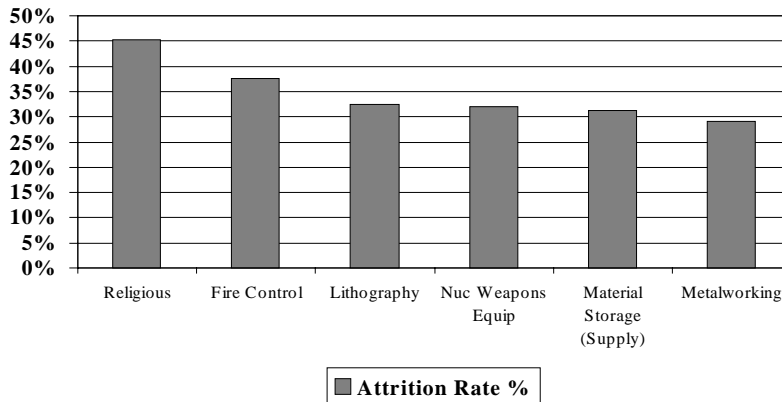
### Attrition by Employment Factors



**Figure 8. Air Force 36-Month Attrition Rate by Employment Factors, FY 84 Cohort<sup>8</sup>**

### Attrition by Career Field

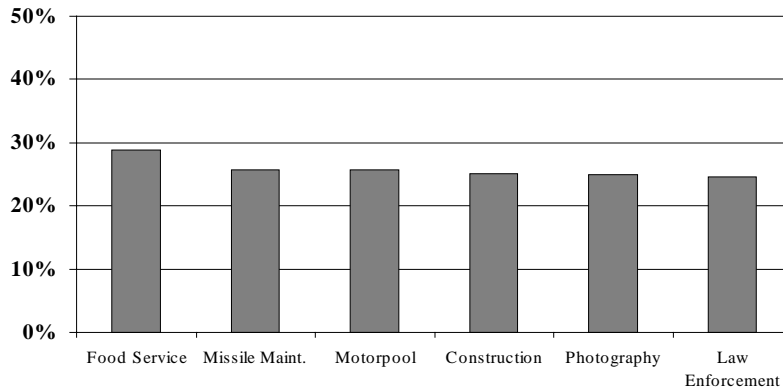
Slide 1



**Figure 9. Air Force 48-Month Attrition Rate by Career Field, Slide 1<sup>9</sup>**

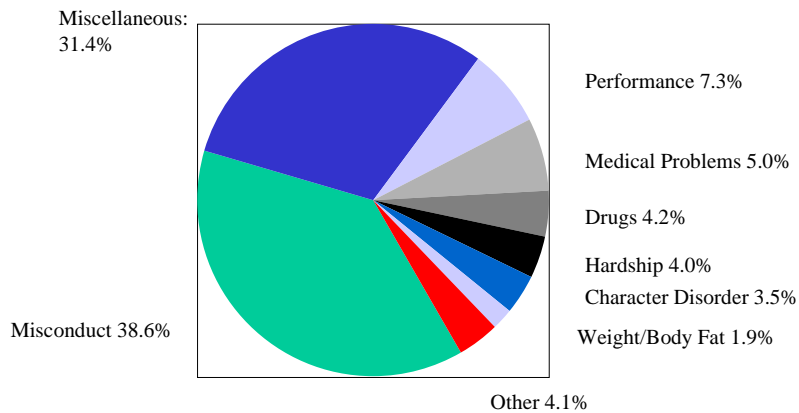
## 48 Month Attrition by Career Field

Slide 2



**Figure 10. Air Force 48-Month Attrition Rate by Career Field, Slide 2<sup>10</sup>**

## Top Reasons for Male Attrition in the Air Force between the 7th and 48th Month: FY 93 Cohort



**Figure 11. Reasons for Male Attrition in the Air Force Between 7<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> Month, FY 93 Cohort<sup>11</sup>**



Top Reasons for Female Attrition in the Air Force  
between the 7th and 48th Month: FY 93 Cohort

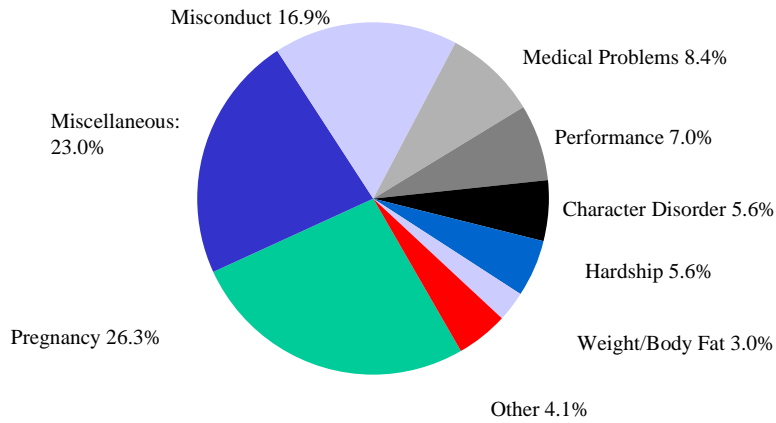
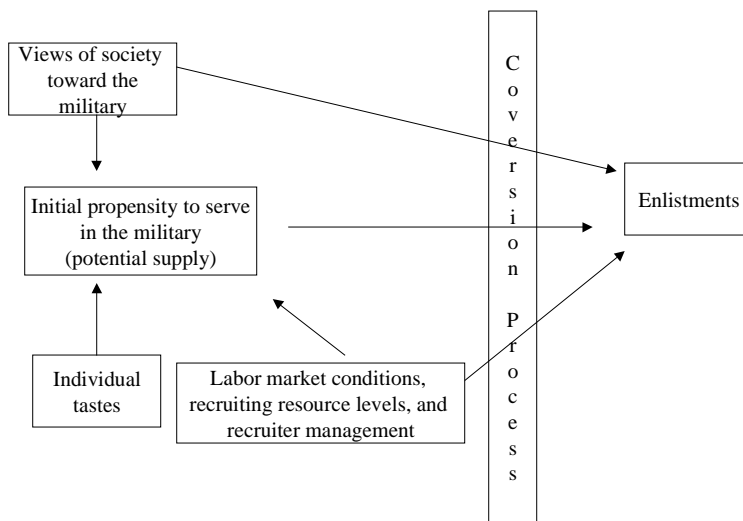


Figure 12. Reasons for Female Attrition in the Air Force Between 7<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> Month, FY 93 Cohort<sup>12</sup>



Conceptual View of the Enlistment Process

Figure 13. Figure 14 Conceptual View of the Enlistment Process<sup>13</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> GAO 98-58, *Military Recruiting*, 2-3.
- <sup>2</sup> GAO 98-213, *Military Attrition/Early Separations*, 23.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.
- <sup>8</sup> Buddin, *Analysis of Early Military Attrition Behavior*, 45.
- <sup>9</sup> GAO 98-213, *Military Attrition/Early Separations*, 64.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.
- <sup>13</sup> Orvis, *Military Recruiting Outlook*, 4.

## *Glossary*

ACSC	Air Command and Staff College
AETC	Air Education and Training Command
AF/DP	Air Force Director of Personnel
AFI	Air Force Instruction
AFPC	Air Force Personnel Center
AFRS	Air Force Recruiting Service
ASVAB	Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery
DMDC	Defense Manpower Data Center
DOD	Department of Defense
GAO	General Accounting Office
GED	General Education Development (certificate)
MEPCOM	Military Entrance Processing Command
MPF	Military Personnel Flight
MSS	Mission Support Squadron
OASD/FMP	Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense/Force Management Policy
OSD/P&R	Office of the Secretary of Defense/Personnel and Readiness
USAF	United States Air Force

**cohort.** A band of soldiers. Used here to describe a group of enlistees for purpose of evaluation and study.

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