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NINETY-THREE STRONG?

A BATTALION COMMANDER'S PERCEPTION
OF THE ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCE

by

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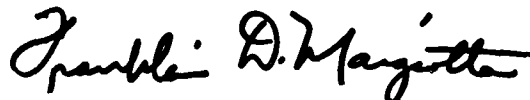
FOREWORD

Since the 1960s, legislators, defense policymakers, and academicians have been debating the merits of a volunteer versus a conscript military force in the United States. The debate grew in intensity after the advent of the all-volunteer force (AVF) and as the quality and quantity of recruits became increasingly questionable in the late 1970s.

The author of this issue paper, Colonel Kenneth A. Ingram, USA, carefully tracked a group of recruits through his battalion in the 1970s. Since that time, the quality and quantity of recruits to the AVF seem to have improved markedly, perhaps partly due to problems in the US economy. This issue paper, however, serves well the purpose of these papers--to contribute insights and background materials to national security policymakers and to others concerned with US national security.

Colonel Ingram's study is clearly limited in scope to one Army unit and in time to a particular period of the All-Volunteer Force. However, during this period Americans were told that the all-volunteer military was the best military in American history. But, it may be too easy in Washington to look at gross statistics on recruits and conclude that a particular manpower system is delivering the appropriate quality and quantity of individuals to make our forces adequate to their tasks.

Colonel Ingram has done a unique bit of research. As he tracks the raw recruits assigned to his unit through their training, we find that after each hurdle, there are many fewer soldiers. His study of a narrow three-year slice of history reminds us that we can never be complacent and that we must search out what happens when the unfiltered recruiting statistics move through the system and become individuals in particular fighting units. Should US forces be called upon to defend our Nation's interest, it is the human beings in the fighting units that will make the difference, no matter what Washington policymakers think is happening.



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SUMMARY

This paper looks at the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) from the perspective of the unit commander. The paper is based on a study of all new accessions (93 males) who reported to a missile battalion during an 8-month period in 1977. The soldiers were observed for 22 to 30 months to test generally accepted hypotheses about the age, education, quality, racial mix, and discharge rate of AVF personnel. An analysis of the findings of the study suggests the following:

- o First term attrition was high because large numbers of unqualified or marginally qualified soldiers entered the force.
- o Less than 50 percent of the troops who joined the battalion were even "satisfactory performers."
- o The AVF did not materially improve personnel stability.
- o Many soldiers were trained in specialties for which they were not qualified.
- o "Very young" and "older" accessions were high-risk investments.
- o A high-school diploma was not an absolute success indicator as it had been in past years.
- o Lower intelligence levels did not always severely limit combat-arms duty performance.
- o Today's combat-arms soldiers probably will be capable of operating the high-technology equipment planned for the 1980s.
- o Behavior learned before entering the Army may be the most important influence upon a soldier's ability to perform satisfactorily.
- o Blacks and other minorities enlisted and reenlisted in the Army more readily than their white counterparts.
- o Judicious use of the Expeditious Discharge can help the battalion commander assure the quality of his force.

The study further suggests that quality would have been improved if recruiters had screened all candidates and denied enlistment to those who had one or more of the following limitations:

- o Was less than 17 or more than 25 years old upon recruitment;
- o Had completed less than 10 years of secondary education;
- o Had documented behavioral and attitudinal problems;
- o Had demonstrated criminal tendencies;
- o Had failed to satisfactorily complete a previous enlistment;
and
- o Had physical shortcomings.

NINETY-THREE STRONG?

INTRODUCTION

Since the United States chose to recruit its armed forces through a volunteer system in 1973, numerous articles and reports have analyzed this approach. These works have been written largely in institutes and organizations outside the US Army or by elements of the Department of Defense several echelons removed from the troop unit. One of the most comprehensive publications on the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) is a Department of Defense (DOD) report, America's Volunteers, dated 31 December 1978. Although this report does not explicitly endorse the AVF, it accentuates positive indicators of success. The success indicator that has gained the most attention at DOD policymaking levels is recruiting. While recruiting was apparently successful through Fiscal Year 1978 and is so again today, demographic indicators suggest that AVF recruiters will eventually have to face a shortage of qualified volunteers.

My purpose in this paper is to provide a perspective on the AVF not often discussed in public--that of a unit commander. In doing so, I intend no expose. My data are both limited and dated. I offer my experiences not as a commentary on today's Army but as an honest account that may be instructive for those who must recruit, train, and lead in the years ahead.

Because the payoff to any manpower program for defense is the readiness of the combat unit, the unit commander's perspective is pertinent to any dialogue about the AVF. My experience as the commander of a nuclear-capable LANCE missile battalion in Germany provided that perspective. I used that opportunity to test generally accepted hypotheses about the age, education, quality, racial mix, and discharge rate of our personnel.

My motivation for conducting these tests came from my skepticism about soldier quality. This skepticism was based upon the criminal conduct, drug and alcohol abuse, and general malingering I observed among too many of my soldiers. These problems appeared to exceed those of my previous troop experience in Germany during the early 1960s and in Vietnam

during the height of our involvement there. I decided, therefore, to systematically study the new soldiers--those recruits assigned to my unit from basic training units. I assessed the new members of my battalion in the hope that this assessment would provide insight into one of the most vexing problems confronting any military leader--manpower availability and quality. Furthermore, because the LANCE was a high-technology system, I supposed that an assessment of the ability of my soldiers to use LANCE equipment might be useful in predicting how well other soldiers would cope with the high-technology equipment of the future.

The soldiers observed during this study included all new accessions who reported to my battalion during an 8-month period in 1977. There were 93 accessions--all male--during this period. None was aware that the study was taking place. Based upon their arrival times, I concluded that nearly all were recruited late in 1976 or very early in 1977.¹ After I had identified the soldiers for the study, their immediate commanders and noncommissioned officers closely monitored their performance. My study continued until I returned to the United States in July 1979. Thus my period of observation of these new members of the battalion ranged from 22 to 30 months.

I should note here that approximately 20 percent of the recruits enrolled in Basic and Advanced Individual Training at Fort Sill during late 1976 and early 1977 failed to graduate.² Therefore, in order for the "manpower pipeline" to deliver 93 new men to my battalion, the Army Recruiting Command recruited approximately 116. These figures are roughly consistent with the DOD experience with new accessions in 1976. During that year 16 percent of DOD recruits were eliminated during their first 6-months of service.³

By combining statistical data with command perceptions, I have reached some conclusions about the quality of the soldiers who came to my battalion. Further, since most of these soldiers completed their basic training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, the Army's only training center for field artillery, it seems fair to say that soldiers going to other field artillery units at the same time were of similar quality. Because of the limited sample size, however, one cannot safely say that my findings apply to the entire US Army.

THE RECRUITING CHALLENGE

Table I summarizes the status on 30 June 1979 (the closing date of my study) of the 116 persons originally recruited to provide my 93 accessions.

TABLE I. STATUS OF 116 RECRUITS AS OF 30 JUNE 1979

ACTION	NUMBER INVOLVED/REMAINING	
Entry on Active Duty	116	116
Training Discharges (Assume 20% Rate)	23	
Assignment to My Battalion		93
Departure After Average of 9 Months Service with My Battalion	31	
--Administrative Discharge	(25)	
--Medical Disqualification	(3)	
--Hardship Discharge	(2)	
--Bad Conduct Discharge	(1)	
Serving on Active Duty		62
Administrative Reassignments	11	
Serving with My Battalion		51
--Performance Rated Marginal/ Unsatisfactory	(11)	
--Performance Rated Satisfactory/ Outstanding	(40)	40

Information in this table at the level of the operational unit causes one to question whether success in meeting recruiting quotas may disguise other important considerations. Only 35 percent of the assumed 116 recruited and 43 percent of the 93 soldiers assigned to my battalion were either "satisfactory" or "outstanding" performers. These figures point to the heavy price we were paying for a competent, combat-ready battalion obtained through the AVF system.

Additional reservations about the success of our recruiting grew from anecdotal reports of my officers and noncommissioned officers that an alarming number of young men volunteered for military service for one or more of the following reasons:

- o Failure in all other endeavors
- o Unavailability of other options
- o Escape from legal or parental authority
- o Perception of success with minimal effort

Of course not all of my new recruits were disappointments. On the positive side, common characteristics of outstanding and satisfactory performers were:

- o Dependability
- o Conscientiousness
- o Task orientation
- o Performance seldom marred by misconduct

The signal characteristic of the outstanding performers was their eagerness to accept responsibility.

TESTING THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM ABOUT THE AVF

During recent years, a set of hypotheses has evolved about the AVF. Some are held as policy within the Defense Department; others have been proposed by scholars studying the AVF. My study suggests that further testing of these hypotheses is in order.

Hypothesis: The AVF Will Increase Personnel Stability

The DOD has supported an initial hypothesis of the Gates Commission, which established the rationale for the AVF, that "the maintenance cost of an All-Volunteer Force is

unquestionably less than the cost of a force of equal size and quality manned wholly or partly through conscription.¹⁴ One of the primary assumptions associated with this hypothesis was that personnel turnover rates would be reduced. This stability would mean reduced expense for training and for permanent-change-of-station moves. The fewer accessions, the fewer transients. However, the experience of my group of 93 recruits suggests that the AVF did not create high personnel stability. By the close of the evaluation period (30 June 1979), 31 of the recruits had been discharged for the reasons detailed in Table 2.

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF DISCHARGES BY TYPE

TYPE DISCHARGE	NUMBER
Expeditious	16
Drug Abuse	4
In Lieu of Court Martial	4
Bad Conduct	1
Hardship	2
Unsuitability	1
Discharge/Reassignment for Medical Reasons	3
TOTAL	31

The obvious result of these discharges was that the original group of 93 soldiers had been reduced to 62: a reduction that directly contradicted our expectations of personnel stability. The 31 men discharged served an average tour of 9 months with the battalion. Five remained in the unit for at least 18 months; five remained for only 2 or 3 months. Also apparent is that the Expeditious Discharge Policy (EDP) accounted for more than half of the total discharges. A retrospective evaluation of each EDP further disclosed that 8 of those 16 men could have been discharged for drug abuse; we used the EDP instead because it

was quicker. An examination of the racial mix of those discharged showed that discharges for whites and minority races were generally proportionate to the percentages of those persons in the group.

While personnel discharges get high visibility at the Department of Defense and the Department of the Army (DA), other less eye-catching actions also add significantly to personnel turbulence and thus to the difficulty of maintaining a combat-ready unit. The most common of these actions in a nuclear-capable unit is disqualification from the Personnel Reliability Program (PRP). The PRP identifies an exclusive group of soldiers in whom the commander places special trust and confidence. Their duties include handling, transporting, assembling, and deploying nuclear weapons. In a LANCE battalion, these soldiers number approximately 170. Because these jobs are sensitive, the PRP requires special security screening, personal in-briefing by the commander, and maintenance of high personal and professional standards. When soldiers fall below PRP standards, they are disqualified, given other jobs, and, in most cases, assigned to other units. Failure of a commander to enforce these standards could result in decertification of his unit as mission qualified.

In addition to PRP disqualifications, other administrative actions, summarized in Table 3, added to personnel turbulence and decreased unit efficiency.

TABLE 3. ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS BY TYPE AND NUMBER

ACTION TYPE	NUMBER	HIGH SCHOOL
		<u>GRADUATES</u>
Disqualified from PRP	9	3
-- Reassigned	(7)	
-- Retained & Reclassified	(2)	
Compassionate Reassignment	2	0
Administrative Transfer	2	1
TOTAL	13	4

The only common denominator for these soldiers is that they all remained in the Army. Nevertheless, 11 were lost to my battalion, further reducing the original group of 93 to 51. Furthermore, the capability of the two soldiers who remained in the battalion diminished as they were required to learn new, mission-relevant skills. Of the nine soldiers who were disqualified from the PRP, five were drug abusers, three were alcohol abusers, and one was disqualified for inaptitude. The two men transferred for administrative reasons had provided information to their commanders concerning others who were abusing drugs. Consequently, their continued presence in the battalion would have jeopardized their personal safety. Although it was not possible to track the performance of those transferred, their reassignments assured continued service and, in some cases, were the first positive steps toward rehabilitation.

Hypothesis: Entry Age Is Not Very Important

This hypothesis accommodated the broad spectrum of ages from which candidates were recruited. Recruiters enlisted candidates of ages 18-34 with a liberal waiver policy for 17-year-olds and those older than 34. To determine whether age could be used to predict success, I looked first at those soldiers ("the Young") who became 17 after 31 December 1977. Next I considered soldiers ("the Older") who were over 25 on 31 December 1977. The number of soldiers who fell into those categories is noted in Table 4.

TABLE 4. NUMBER OF SOLDIERS BY AGE CATEGORY

AGE CATEGORY	TOTAL NUMBER
Young	5
Older	11
TOTAL	16

Table 5 evaluates these two groups from the standpoint of their performance.

TABLE 5. EVALUATION OF
"YOUNG" AND "OLDER" RECRUITS

CRITERION	NUMBER	
	YOUNG	OLDER
Did Not Complete Service with My Battalion	4	7
Completed Service with My Battalion	1	4
-- Satisfactory or Higher Performer	(0)	(3)
-- Marginal or Lower Performer	(1)	(1)

The performance of both groups was clearly substandard. Only 3 of 16 (18.75 percent) were at least satisfactory performers, while 11 of 16 (69 percent) failed to complete their service obligation with my battalion. These substantially inferior performers (16) constituted 17 percent of the recruits in the evaluated group. I conclude, therefore, that recruitment of soldiers in these age brackets may be a high risk for the Army and that entry age could be a valid indicator of potential success or failure.

Hypothesis: There Are Too Many Discharges in the AVF

The DOD report America's Volunteers suggested in 1978 that too many discharges were being approved for soldiers during their first three years of service. In the Army the attrition rate rose from 26 percent in Fiscal Year 1971 to 38 percent in Fiscal Year 1974. The DOD average for Fiscal Year 1974 was 37 percent. Attrition rates for the Army were estimated at 37 percent, 35 percent, and 30 percent for Fiscal Years 1975, 1976, and 1977, respectively, and projections for Fiscal Years 1978 and 1979 were 30 percent and 31 percent. The Secretary of Defense, therefore, directed in 1978 that efforts be made to decrease attrition. The report stated: "While it is important that the services be able to release malcontents and people who do not adapt to military life, we have gone too far and are now releasing many persons who could have productive careers in the military."⁵ Of course

the important question is whether such discharges could, if retained, have productive careers. The tone of the Department of Defense Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1981 mellows by emphasizing that it is undesirable to retain unproductive or counterproductive soldiers in order to reduce attrition. Therefore, attrition should be lowered by increasing the management attention devoted to this problem and by screening those who enter the force to exclude high-risk personnel.⁶

Despite the Army's induction standards, citizens were informed through the news media in 1979 that young Americans joined the Army with inadequate physical, mental, and educational qualifications.⁷ Unfortunately, my personal experience substantiates these charges. Field commanders are aware of these problems because they routinely confront and discharge substandard soldiers. The following biographical sketches of 11 of my 93 recruits illustrate the point:

Recruit 1: This soldier's vision was correctable to only 20-200—a physically disqualifying factor. Consequently, he could not drive a vehicle, use optical instruments, or be admitted to the PRP. Nevertheless, he was trained as a LANCE missile crewman, a specialty that required all three capabilities. Upon arrival, this man was 18 years old. His 16-year-old wife left him just a month after arriving in Europe. He drank heavily and lobbied openly for a discharge. After 8 turbulent months of unsatisfactory performance, he was reassigned to the United States, where special medical care was available.

Recruit 2: This soldier entered the Army with severe medical problems stemming from an auto accident that occurred when he was 16 years old. He was trained as a LANCE missile crewman even though he was physically unqualified to perform nuclear-related duties. Because his hips and legs were held together with metal pins requiring frequent adjustment, he was prohibited from engaging in even minimal physical activity. Although he served in the battalion for about a year, he could not participate in field training exercises. After 10 months of limited duty, he was reassigned to the United States where special medical care was available.

Recruit 3: This soldier had vision in only one eye, and the corrected vision in his good eye was 20-800, clearly beyond the

limits of medical acceptability. Although not medically qualified for enlistment, he was trained as a LANCE missile crewman. His visual limitations precluded his driving a vehicle or working in the specialty for which he was trained. Because of these limitations, he was reassigned to Walter Reed Hospital for medical treatment.

Recruit 4: During this soldier's few months in the battalion, he was found positive for drugs on three separate urine tests, failed the drug rehabilitation program, wrote seven bad checks with subsequent revocation of check-cashing privileges, and had two traffic accidents with subsequent revocation of his driver's license. This high school graduate's investigative dossier revealed that he had previously served in the Army, a fact not reflected in his military personnel file. The security investigation initiated after his arrival also revealed that during his prior Army service, which had ended only 6 months before his assignment to my battalion, he had been charged twice with criminal assault and had been enrolled in the drug rehabilitation program. This man was deeply involved in drug trafficking from the moment of his arrival. His previous duty station was only 15 miles from our location, and it was a simple matter for him to reestablish old contacts. We administratively discharged him in lieu of court martial.

Recruit 5: This 35-year-old private admitted to prior service in Korea although his military record did not reflect that service. A myriad of problems ensued when his battery commander received letters from two women, both claiming to be his wife. Under questioning, he admitted to bigamy. Had this man's personal indiscretions been discovered earlier, it is probable he would not have been trained as a LANCE missile crewman, a specialty that required entry into the PRP. Because of his problems, we administratively removed him from the battalion less than 90 days after he arrived. He spent 30 of those 90 days on emergency leave necessitated by "extreme personal problems."

Recruit 6: A review of this soldier's investigative dossier disclosed that he had been arrested several times by civil authorities before entering the Army. In addition to minor offenses, he had been arrested once for arson and once for armed robbery. Because his criminal tendencies precluded his adjusting to Army life, we arranged an Expeditious Discharge for him.

Recruit 7: This 36-year-old private's assignment to the battalion ended less than 90 days after his arrival. His extreme personal problems and attendant nervousness prevented him from sleeping--a condition which, of itself, disqualified him from performing nuclear-related duties. Less than 30 days after he arrived in Germany, we sent him back to the United States on an emergency leave. A bizarre string of events occurred during his leave, including his confinement to a state mental institution for 10 days and the arrest of his wife for assault with a deadly weapon. Needless to say, these events only exacerbated his personal problems and nervous condition. His next departure was under the condition of compassionate reassignment; he subsequently received a Hardship Discharge.

Recruit 8: This highly immature soldier was burdened with severe emotional and psychological problems that were brought to the attention of a psychiatrist during his basic training. He returned from his first field training exercise with a fully unrealistic fear of being shot by a Russian sniper or being incarcerated in a Russian prisoner-of-war camp. He closeted himself during his 2 months with the battalion and was expeditiously discharged upon completing 6 months of active service.

Recruit 9: This soldier's recalcitrance, refusal to accept authority, and lack of respect for laws and rules eventually led to his discharge in lieu of court martial. Upon questioning this man, we learned that he had been previously discharged from the US Marine Corps. Neither his prior service nor his Administrative Discharge was reflected in his official personnel file.

Recruit 10: This soldier had been administratively discharged from the US Air Force for alcoholism. His prior service was not reflected in his personnel file because "the recruiter advised him that such an entry would preclude his eligibility for enlistment." Although he was a fraudulent enlistee, his satisfactory performance of duty merited his retention on active duty.

Recruit 11: This soldier was another fraudulent enlistee who had been previously discharged from both the US Marine Corps and the US Air Force. His prior service was not reflected in his personnel file. Like Recruit 10, he served satisfactorily and was retained.

Although a small number of recruits with such dubious qualifications may find productive careers in the armed services, it is more likely that they will end up like those who were discharged from my unit. If they are retained, they will probably reject counsel and assistance. Furthermore, their problems are likely to consume an inordinate amount of their supervisors' personal and professional time. This is a serious matter because even a few soldiers who fail to respond to leadership, who regularly violate established rules, and who fail to meet standards, can seriously reduce the morale and effectiveness of a combat unit. Commanders do not take personal delight in discharging soldiers, but they recognize that the departure of each drug abuser, malingerer, criminal, or substandard performer improves the unit for those who remain. The discharge is, therefore, a professional necessity for the maintenance of morale, discipline, and unit effectiveness. If too many were being discharged, perhaps it was because unit commanders were confronted with too many who should not have been recruited in the first place.

Hypothesis: Education Equals Success

Regardless of the quality of one's high school education, the possession of a high-school diploma has been viewed as an important early indicator of success. Accordingly, the Army uses the high-school diploma as an indicator of the quality of its new accessions.⁸

In modern times, educational levels have been a matter of urgent concern to US commanders. At the close of the Korean War, Lieutenant General Maxwell Taylor, then serving as Commander of the US Eighth Army in Korea, was dismayed to discover that about 10 percent of his soldiers could not produce evidence of completion of 4 years of grammar school, the level of education considered essential for literacy. General Taylor, therefore, used the armistice lull to provide an opportunity for his soldiers to improve their educational standing. The goal of this instruction was to provide all soldiers with at least a fourth-grade education and noncommissioned officers with an eighth-grade level.⁹

When one compares the educational level of today's soldier with the soldiers in General Taylor's Eighth Army, today's soldier is obviously better educated. A noncommissioned officer today is expected to complete a high-school education, and many of the senior noncommissioned officers are earning college credits or degrees. But, as educational levels have advanced, so have weapon-system technologies. Today's weaponry and equipment demand the attention of soldiers who can grasp mathematical, electrical, mechanical, and physiological concepts, and who can comprehend standard written English.

The Department of Defense suggested in 1978 that the AVF had provided the best Army in our history.¹⁰ But the critical question is not whether today's soldier knows more than his counterpart in 1950; the question is whether the AVF can provide soldiers who know enough to operate today's sophisticated equipment. Table 6 summarizes what I learned about the educational accomplishments of my soldiers.

TABLE 6. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
BY NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE

LEVEL	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
High School Graduates	50	54
Grades 10-11	38	40
Less than grade 10	5	6
TOTAL	93	100

The percentage of high-school graduates in this sample (54 percent) is consistent with the 59 percent recruited by the Army during both Fiscal Years 1976 and 1977. The DOD average for those 2 years was 69 percent.¹¹

An indication of mental aptitude is provided by the General Technical (GT)* composite score of the DOD enlistment test, the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). My soldiers averaged 104 points on this test. The scores with the greatest frequency were 92 and 106; each occurred 8 times. Thirty-eight soldiers scored less than 100, and 52 scored 100 or greater. A score of 100 points is considered average in the Army. Thus, these numbers indicate that the ability levels of my soldiers were generally consistent with the Army average. Of the 50 high-school graduates, only 2 had completed college credits prior to entry on active duty. The high-school graduates in this group averaged 106 and the non-high-school graduates averaged 102. Despite these "average" educational statistics, however, commanders in my units were regularly confronted with soldiers who possessed limited ability to read basic Field and Technical Manuals.

Although we did not maintain reading level statistics, the battalion training program included regular sessions to improve reading, writing, and mathematical skills for selected noncommissioned officers and enlisted soldiers. The lack of reading skill in the ranks has attracted widespread attention¹² and is by no means limited to non-high-school graduates. However, we did not consider that this problem compromised combat readiness in our battalion, and we felt that we could overcome the problem through the aforementioned courses and additional sessions of individualized instruction conducted by officers and noncommissioned officers.

Our most serious limitations occurred in those jobs requiring mathematical proficiency (fire direction and survey), typing and administrative skills (clerks), and duties requiring use of detailed instructional manuals (logistical specialists and missile technicians). More importantly, perhaps, my analysis showed that possession of a high-school diploma was not a reliable predictor of job performance. This is consistent with

*The GT composite score is composed of word knowledge, paragraph comprehension, and arithmetic reasoning subtests. It serves as a measure of general trainability.

other DOD findings. Possession of a diploma is merely a sound indicator of adaptability to military service. That is, a high-school graduate has about an 80 percent probability compared to a 60 percent probability for the nongraduate.* Finally, it appears that the AVF combat-arms soldier is capable of operating the high-technology equipment planned for the Army of the 1980s. (Education, as it relates to job performance, is further discussed with the next hypothesis.)

Hypothesis: The Soldiers of the AVF Are the Best in the Nation's History

By any standard, the most important measure of a soldier's effectiveness is his performance on the job. With this in mind, my commanders and I initiated and maintained ratings on all 93 men throughout the evaluation period. As significant events occurred, we noted them. Battery commanders twice submitted written ratings to me. I asked the commanders to rate duty performance as "outstanding," "satisfactory," "marginal," or "unsatisfactory."¹³ Because of command changes, each man was rated by at least two battery commanders during the evaluation period.

Let us now examine how the 51 men remaining from the original 116 performed on the job. Table 7 summarizes performance ratings for the whole group and for the high-school graduates.

The data in Table 7, combined with command experience in the battalion, led me to the following tentative ideas about the relationship between possession of a high-school diploma and performance in the Army:

*Manpower Requirements Report for FY 1982. (See chapter on "Recruit Quality.") Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower, Reserve Affairs and Logistics), February 1981.

TABLE 7. PERFORMANCE RATINGS CORRELATED
WITH HIGH-SCHOOL GRADUATION

RATED CATEGORY	NUMBER	HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE			
		YES	% YES	NO	% NO
Total Outstanding and Satisfactory	40	26	65	14	35
-- Outstanding	(22)	(17)	(77)	(5)	(23)
-- Satisfactory	(18)	(9)	(50)	(9)	(50)
Total Marginal and Unsatisfactory	11	5	45	6	55
-- Marginal	(6)	(5)	(84)	(1)	16
-- Unsatisfactory	(5)	(0)	(0)	(5)	100
GRAND TOTAL	51	31	60.8	20	39.2

- o The truly productive soldiers (40) constituted 43 percent of the number assigned to us (93) and 35 percent of the assumed number recruited (116).
- o Satisfactory and outstanding performers graduated from high school at a higher rate (65 percent) than did the entire group of 93 recruits (54 percent).
- o None of the unsatisfactory performers possessed a high-school diploma. Although Table 7 does not contain information on achieved grade level, a closer examination of the records of the unsatisfactory performers revealed an average of 10 years of secondary education. Two had completed only 9 years, and 2 had completed 11 years.

- o Although a high percentage of the marginal performers had completed high school, as a group they were prone to misconduct and drug and alcohol abuse. None could accept responsibility, but their deficiencies were not serious enough to warrant removal from our unit.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to demonstrate that today's soldiers are, or are not, the best in our nation's history. In this one case, however, it was necessary to recruit 116 in order to obtain 40 satisfactory performers for a field artillery battalion. To the extent that these results can be generalized to the entire Army, this study suggests there is ample room for improvement in force quality. It also suggests that societal forces other than education strongly affect the probability of a soldier's success. Behavior learned before entering the Army may be the most important influence on a soldier's ability to perform satisfactorily. The disposition of the 51 recruits remaining at the end of the evaluation (42 of my original 93 accessions had been discharged early or administratively reassigned) is shown in Table 8.

TABLE 8. STATUS OF 51 SOLDIERS AS OF 30 JUNE 1979

STATUS	NUMBER
Honorable Discharge upon Completion of a Normal Enlistment	8
Permanent Change of Station after Serving Normal Tour in Germany	6
Voluntary Extension of Tour with My Battalion	4
Reenlistments	6
Still Serving First Tour with My Battalion	27
TOTAL	51

Hypothesis: All-Volunteer Equals Almost All Minority

In 1974 (almost 5 years after the Gates Commission Report), Janowitz and Moskos suggested that a trend toward an increasing number of blacks, especially in ground combat units, was already underway.¹⁴ This observation differed markedly from the predictions of the Gates Commission that blacks would account for only 14 percent of the enlisted force during the 1980s and that the end of conscription would not fundamentally change the racial composition of the armed forces.¹⁵ Janowitz and Moskos thus cast doubt on both the representativeness and the political legitimacy of the AVF military.

To measure their hypothesis in my own unit, I maintained information on the racial mix of my soldiers. The categories in Table 9 are standard for the Army: "White"; "Black"; and "Other."

TABLE 9. RACIAL DISTRIBUTION

RACE	MY UNIT		ARMY WIDE:	
	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	% ENLISTED	% ALL
White	58	62	67.3	70.3
Black	30	32	29.2	26.3
Other	5	6	3.5	3.4
TOTAL	93	100	100.0	100.0

The percentage of blacks in this group is about the same as the percentage (30) among the Army's new accessions for 1977.¹⁶

Aside from the accessions, though, other factors contributed to an increasing number of "Black" and "Other" soldiers in the battalion. In a 2 year period, minority soldiers in the battalion increased from 25 percent to 45 percent. The other three artillery battalions in the group contained larger numbers of minorities. At the close of 1978, minority soldiers made up about 55 percent of those units. Such a trend was also reflected in DOD statistics for Fiscal Year 1979, which showed that the minority content of the enlisted Army was about 40 percent (Blacks--32 percent). These increases since 1972 are products of both the increasing accession rates and the higher-than-average reenlistment rates among black enlisted personnel.¹⁷

From a military standpoint, this trend posed no problem in my battalion. Good men, regardless of ethnic origin, take pride in maintaining high levels of unit readiness. However, scholars may question, as did Janowitz and Moskos, the wisdom of allowing the military to become a racially distinct enclave.¹⁸ Such an unrepresentative military means that racial minorities will bear a disproportionate burden of responsibility for our national defense and, accordingly, a disproportionate share of casualties in any future conflict.

THE CHALLENGE TO THE ARMY

My analysis--offered in the traditional Army spirit of locating the problem so that we can do something about it--suggests the following:

- o First term attrition was high because large numbers of unqualified or marginally qualified soldiers entered the force.
- o Less than 50 percent of the troops who joined my battalion were even "satisfactory" performers.
- o The AVF did not materially improve personnel stability.
- o Many soldiers were trained in specialties for which they were unqualified.

- o "Very young" and "older" accessions were high-risk investments.
- o A high school-diploma in the AVF was not an absolute success indicator as it had been in past years.
- o Lower intelligence levels did not always severely limit combat-arms duty performance.
- o Today's combat-arms soldiers probably will be capable of operating the high-technology equipment planned for the 1980s.
- o Behavior learned before entering the Army may be the most important influence upon a soldier's ability to perform satisfactorily.
- o Blacks and other minorities enlisted and reenlisted in the Army more readily than their white counterparts.
- o Judicious use of the Expeditious Discharge can help the battalion commander assure the quality of his force.

Additionally, my study suggests that quality would have been better if recruiters had carefully screened all candidates and denied enlistment to those who possessed one or more of the following limitations:

- o Less than 17 or more than 25 years old upon recruitment
- o Completion of less than 10 years of secondary education
- o Documented behavioral and attitudinal problems
- o Demonstration of criminal tendencies
- o Failure to satisfactorily complete a previous enlistment
- o Physical shortcomings

There is, however, a certain dilemma implicit in the above factors. If a recruiter adopts these standards to give the Army

the quality manpower it needs, he may not be able to give it the quantity it requires. Fluctuations in the economy will make recruiting easier at some times than at others, but we can readily recall times during recent years when all armed services failed to meet assigned recruiting goals. During Fiscal Year 1979, for example, the Army accomplished only 89 percent of its goal.¹⁹

We cannot lay the entire responsibility for solving the Army's manpower problems on the Army recruiter. He is asked to convince the best youth of a society to join the military when segments of the society itself have told the youth that service in the defense of one's country is no longer a responsibility of citizenship. Furthermore, the recruiter is often denied access to high-school campuses and to police files. Finally, we are reminded by the Army War College Study on Military Professionalism that "pressures to achieve unrealistic [recruiting] goals, whether imposed by design or generated through incompetence, soon strain the ethical fiber of the organization."²⁰ When a recruiter fails to achieve recruiting goals, his performance is viewed as substandard. Repeated shortfalls usually result in reassignment accompanied by a mediocre performance rating. The logical outcome of these pressures is a struggle for professional survival in which short-term objectives may take precedence over the long-term best interests of the Army.

Eighty-nine percent of the Army's recruiting goal for Fiscal Year 1979 translated into a shortfall of approximately 16,000 soldiers, which equates to the strength of a combat division. The Army responded to that shortfall by implementing a number of new incentives and by making male candidates with ninth-grade educations eligible for enlistment. A review of the inadequate performance of the ninth graders in my sample who apparently enlisted illegally provides some insight into the desirability of this decision.

An unfortunate side effect of enlisting low-quality individuals may be to drive out in disgust quality career soldiers who perceive that their careers are being demeaned by less capable recruits.²¹ Regardless of rank or duty assignment, a common thread that binds the Army's fabric is the desire of all members to belong to a proud organization and to be esteemed

by the public. This pride may become increasingly rare if induction standards are altered to accommodate an inordinately large and regular infusion of mediocrity.

The purpose of this brief study is to provide a different perspective of the AVF--a combat battalion commander's point of view. My analysis suggests that the AVF in 1977 may not have delivered people in the quality and quantity required by the Army. However, the basic issue--maintaining an Army that is truly, and in all respects, combat ready--is one that Army recruiters alone cannot resolve. Finally, it is the American voter, not the Army, who must decide whether our society is willing to defend itself, willing to serve.

NOTES

1. After enlistment, each recruit must complete a minimum of 12 weeks training. Selected soldiers are trained for additional periods depending upon the complexity of their specialty. Recruits destined for assignment to LANCE battalions were normally trained for 4 to 5 months. Allowing for 30 days leave prior to overseas deployment, most new accessions had completed about six months service upon arrival.

2. This figure was provided to me by two field-grade officers, representing the Field Artillery School, who visited my unit during 1977. Although they were not quoting precise data, their knowledge and experience, as well as the close correlation of their numbers with official data found in America's Volunteers, suggest that their figure is credible.

3. US, Department of Defense, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower, Reserve Affairs and Logistics), America's Volunteers--A Report on the All-Volunteer Force, 31 December 1978, p. 67.

4. The Report of the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Force (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 20 February 1970), p. 28. (Hereafter, Gates Report.)

5. America's Volunteers, p. 67.

6. US, Department of Defense Annual Report Fiscal Year 1981, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 29 January 1980), p. 268.

7. "Recruits Pass Physical Despite Epilepsy, Asthma," Washington Post, 21 October 1979, p. A10.

8. America's Volunteers, p. 24.

9. Maxwell Taylor, Swords and Plowshares (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972), p. 151.

10. "Volunteers--Pentagon Says Quality Is Equal To Or Better Than That Under The Draft," Stars and Stripes, 30 December 1978, p. 1. This article was apparently based upon a review of America's Volunteers.

11. America's Volunteers, p. 199.
12. "Problem: Find Recruits Who Can Read," Stars and Stripes, 5 March 1979, p. 1.
13. "Outstanding": Soldier possesses personal and professional attributes which are clearly above the norm. "Satisfactory": Soldier has performed in an acceptable manner. He may have initially experienced problems adjusting to military life but his personal conduct and job performance are now satisfactory. "Marginal": Soldier has required special counseling and supervision in order to attain minimum acceptable job standards. "Unsatisfactory": Soldier's personal conduct or duty performance or a combination of the two factors are unsatisfactory. He requires excessive supervision and there is little or no return in terms of performance. This man would not be favorably considered for reenlistment.
14. Morris Janowitz and Charles C. Moskos, Jr., "Racial Composition in the All-Volunteer Force," Armed Forces and Society 1 (November 1974): 109-111.
15. Gates Report, pp. 15, and 141-43.
16. America's Volunteers, p. 38.
17. Department of Defense Annual Report, Fiscal Year 1981, p. 279.
18. "Racial Composition in the All-Volunteer Force," pp. 109, 123.
19. Washington Post, 20 October 1979, p. 2.
20. US Army War College, Study on Military Professionalism (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, 1970), p. 24.
21. "Demeaning Military Service," Colorado Springs Sun, 20 September 1979, p. 20.

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