United States General Accounting Office

GAO

Report to the Chairman, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate

July 1994

DOD TRAINING

Many DOD Linguists Do Not Meet Minimum Proficiency Standards

GAO/NSIAD-94-191

GAO

United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

151976

National Security and
International Affairs Division

B-256342

July 12, 1994

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This report responds to your request that we review Department of Defense (DOD) training of linguists engaged in intelligence-related activities. Our objectives were to examine (1) the language and technical training provided to DOD linguists and (2) DOD and military service policies and procedures governing the management, training, and compensation of the linguist workforce.

Results in Brief

A significant number of linguists are graduating from DOD's language training school, the Defense Language Institute (DLI), without having obtained the limited language proficiency desired. This proficiency level—level 2—is defined as having sufficient language capability to meet routine social demands and limited job requirements. At a level 2, the linguist can deal with concrete topics in past, present, and future tense.

Although DLI has significantly increased the number of students graduating at level 2 or higher in recent years, about one-third of all students continue to graduate below the level 2 proficiency. Moreover, the military services routinely allow students who do not attain a level 2 proficiency to proceed to the next phase of training—technical school.

Linguists experience a decline in language proficiency while in technical school, where training is focused primarily on developing non-language skills. Defense studies of Army linguists graduating from DLI show that a decline of up to 25 percent in language proficiency is not unusual during technical school. While most linguists regain the proficiency lost during technical school over time, these same studies show that not all linguists are successful in regaining the level of language proficiency achieved upon graduation from DLI.

Except for the Army, military service regulations do not require operating unit commanders to establish unit-level language maintenance programs. Decisions on whether to establish a program are left to the discretion of the unit commander, resulting in some units with very aggressive and

well-developed programs and others with little or no language maintenance training.

Military service policies and procedures are also inconsistent with regard to the use of language proficiency standards as the basis for awarding foreign language proficiency pay. This leads to not all services requiring their linguists to meet the level 2 minimum proficiency standard to receive proficiency pay. Moreover, within the services, proficiency pay is not equal for the same level of achievement.

Two of DOD's primary language training schools do not coordinate their commercial language training class schedules, which could result in duplicate, half-filled classes.

Background

DOD's intelligence linguist workforce consists of approximately 18,500 military and civilian linguists trained in over 56 languages. Most DOD linguists are engaged in either signals intelligence (SIGINT) or human intelligence (HUMINT) activities. SIGINT linguists collect intelligence information by intercepting, translating, and analyzing electronic voice communications, whereas HUMINT linguists debrief people, screen and translate foreign language materials, serve as translators, and during wartime, interrogate prisoners of war and exploit captured documents.

DOD Language Proficiency Measured Against Federal Standards

DOD measures language proficiency—defined as the ability to communicate in the foreign language using listening, reading, and speaking skills—against standards established by the Federal Interagency Language Roundtable. The roundtable standards measure proficiency at six different levels, from proficiency level zero (no practical ability) to proficiency level 5 (functional native ability). Table 1 shows the language characteristics of each proficiency level.

Table 1: Federal Language Proficiency Standards

Proficiency level	Language capability characteristics
0 - None	No practical capability in the language.
1 - Elementary	Sufficient capability to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy and travel requirements.
2 - Limited working	Sufficient capability to meet routine social demands and limited job requirements. Can deal with concrete topics in past, present, and future tense.
3 - General professional	Able to use the language with sufficient ability to participate in most formal and informal discussions on practical, social, and professional topics. Can conceptualize and hypothesize.
4 - Advanced professional	Able to use the language fluently and accurately on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs. Has range of language skills necessary for persuasion, negotiation, and counseling.
5 - Functionally native	Able to use the language at a functional level equivalent to a highly articulate, well-educated native speaker.

The General Officer Steering Committee—a policy-making group comprised of senior DOD intelligence and language training officials responsible for providing guidance and recommendations for the overall management of the Defense Foreign Language Program—recommended that military linguists achieve a level 2 as the minimum to graduate from language school.

High Language Proficiency Level Needed

To perform their duties, it is essential that linguists be proficient in the language of the country targeted for intelligence collection. DOD officials cited several recent international incidents that have demonstrated the need for linguists to obtain higher language proficiency levels. For example, we were told that in Operation Desert Storm, Army linguists did not have a high enough language proficiency level to keep up with the flow of enemy communications once the ground battle started.

DOD's head of SIGINT training—the Cryptologic Training Manager—estimates that as many as 50 percent of DOD's SIGINT linguist workforce is below a level 2 language proficiency. Similarly, a recent report prepared by the Army in April 1993 indicates that less than 40 percent of the Army's active duty and 20 percent of its reserve linguists meet the level 2 language proficiency standard.

Language Training Is a Lengthy and Expensive Process

To sustain its workforce, DOD trains about 4,600 new linguists a year, and in fiscal year 1992, it spent an estimated $78 million for language training. DOD operates three primary language training facilities: DLI in Monterey, California; DLI's Contract Foreign Language Training Program in Washington, D.C.; and the National Security Agency (NSA) National Cryptologic School at Fort Meade, Maryland. These schools provide conversational (global) language training to their students. Appendix I contains additional information concerning the operations at these facilities.

Language training takes place in a formal classroom setting, with DLI schools training mostly military linguists and the National Cryptologic School training civilians for NSA. Languages are grouped into four categories, each representing the difficulty a native English speaker is expected to have in learning the language. Course lengths range from 25 weeks for the less difficult category I languages, such as French and Spanish, to 63 weeks for the more difficult category IV languages such as Arabic and Chinese.

After completing language school, military linguists attend technical training to learn how to operate the equipment and the military procedures used in their work. Technical training for SIGINT personnel ranges from 12 to 19 weeks at Goodfellow Air Force Base, Texas. HUMINT technical training for interrogators, lasting 9 weeks, is conducted at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. According to National Cryptologic School officials, NSA civilians obtain their technical skills through on-the-job training.

Following technical school, military linguists are assigned to operational units where command language programs are intended to provide continued language training opportunities. These programs may be on- or off-duty, group or self-study, and mandatory or voluntary and held in-house or under contract with a local teaching facility. Language maintenance programs also involve instructional media ranging from cassette language tapes to instructor/student interaction via a satellite video telecommunications system.

Language Proficiency Standard Not Met by Many DLI Graduates

Depending on the language category, DOD sends linguists to DLI for 25 to 63 weeks to learn foreign languages to a level 2 proficiency. However, military linguists do not have to meet the level 2 proficiency standard to graduate from DLI. Data shows that in fiscal year 1992, only 69 percent of the graduates met the SIGINT proficiency goal, and only

50 percent of the graduates met the HUMINT proficiency goal. DLI's diploma only certifies that linguists have completed a language training course and taken the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT).

Percentage of Language School Graduates Meeting Minimum Proficiency Standard Increasing

The General Officer Steering Committee assigned DLI the goal of graduating at least 80 percent of all linguists at the level 2 proficiency or higher to increase the overall proficiency of the linguist workforce. Although DLI has not achieved this goal, it has significantly increased the number of linguists graduating at the level 2 or higher. According to DLI data, linguists meeting the SIGINT proficiency standard increased from 29 percent in fiscal year 1985 to 69 percent in fiscal year 1992. For the same years, linguists graduating at the HUMINT proficiency standard increased from about 13 percent to 50 percent. Table 2 shows DLI's training results in fiscal year 1985 compared to fiscal year 1992.

Table 2: Improved DLI Training Proficiency

Rates in percent

Language category	Fiscal year 1985 SIGINT	Fiscal year 1992 SIGINT	Fiscal year 1985 HUMINT	Fiscal year 1992 HUMINT
Category I	48	77	19	54
Category II	36	70	18	49
Category III	28	82	12	63
Category IV	18	41	4	25
All students	29	69	13	50

DLI hopes to further increase the percentage of graduates at the level 2 or higher by continually modifying its instructional methodologies or course curriculums. For example, in fiscal year 1990, only about 30 percent of the graduates from the 47-week Arabic course achieved a level 2 proficiency. As a test, DLI then extended the length of the Arabic course from 47 weeks to 63 weeks. By fiscal year 1992, over 60 percent of the graduates from the 63-week course achieved a level 2 proficiency. DLI plans to increase the length of all category IV language courses to 63 weeks by fiscal year 1995.

Service Waiver System Allows Linguists to Graduate Below Level 2

Although attainment of a level 2 proficiency is the Cryptologic Training System's prerequisite for SIGINT linguists to enter technical training school, most services routinely waive this requirement. The Cryptologic Training Manager established the waiver system in 1989 to avoid unacceptable attrition rates in the training system.

According to the Cryptologic Training System representative at DLI, since fiscal year 1991, the Army has tightened up on the number of non-level 2 linguists who receive a waiver. However, for fiscal years 1991 and 1992, the Army still granted waivers to about 70 percent of its non-level 2 graduates. Service officials from the Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps said almost all their students who do not achieve a level 2 proficiency will get a waiver.

Training officials at the HUMINT technical training school said they prefer that new trainees have a level 2 proficiency to attend interrogator training school, but attainment of a level 2 proficiency is currently not a requirement. Although language proficiency is important once the linguists report to their operational units, during interrogator technical training school, the course is taught primarily in English. During the course, the students only receive 25 hours of language instruction and practice interrogations in their assigned language during a 3-day field training exercise at the end of the course. In fact, there are no prerequisites for students to be proficient in a foreign language to take the interrogator course. The only prerequisites were that the students were enlisted personnel and non-native speakers of English had to score an 85 on the English Language Comprehension Level Test.

Language Proficiency Deteriorates During Technical Training School

After language school, military linguists attend technical training school to learn the fundamental technical skills needed to conduct the mission. During technical school, SIGINT linguists learn how to intercept and extract intelligence information from foreign electronic voice communications. HUMINT linguists learn how to obtain intelligence information from human and other sources.

While both SIGINT and HUMINT linguists are exposed to the foreign language equivalent of technical and mission-specific terms during technical training, according to technical school officials, global language training is not an integral part of their technical training programs. Defense studies, conducted in 1985 and 1992, indicate that during technical training school, linguists experience a temporary loss of their global language proficiency because intensive language training is not part of the technical school curriculum. A joint Army Research Institute and DLI study showed that linguists temporarily lose up to 25 percent of their language proficiency while attending technical school. The study included about 1,900 Army SIGINT and HUMINT Spanish, German, Russian, and Korean linguists who started their language training course at DLI between February 1986 and

August 1987. The study found that while the mean test scores declined at the end of technical school, the scores rebounded after the linguists had been at their operating units for several years. However, in Russian and Korean, even after several years at an operating unit, the proficiency levels of the linguists in the study did not return to the proficiency level they had when they graduated from DLI. The study concluded that the near-absence of global language training opportunities at technical school generally resulted in a loss of language skills, followed by a less dramatic, but extended recovery of language proficiency after linguists had been at their operating units for several years.

A 1992 follow-up study conducted under a contract sponsored by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, using the data from the 1985 study, found that about 30 percent of the linguists did not regain the proficiency they lost during technical school. Both the 1985 and 1992 studies found that during technical school, HUMINT linguists experienced a sharper decline in language skills than SIGINT linguists, but did not explain the reason for the difference. The studies did not provide recommendations as to how to avoid the loss of global language proficiency during technical school.

In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD pointed out that the only way to prevent proficiency loss during follow-on training would be to extend the course lengths to include language maintenance training. However, it indicated that the current resource climate will not support an extension of course lengths to include language maintenance training.

Figures 1 and 2 show the language loss rates in listening and reading skills for the four languages in the studies. Due to a limited sample size, the study only drew conclusions on the speaking loss in two languages, as shown in figure 3.[1]

[1]The DLPT scores in the figures indicate language proficiency levels.

Figure 1: Listening Proficiency Lost While Attending Technical Training School

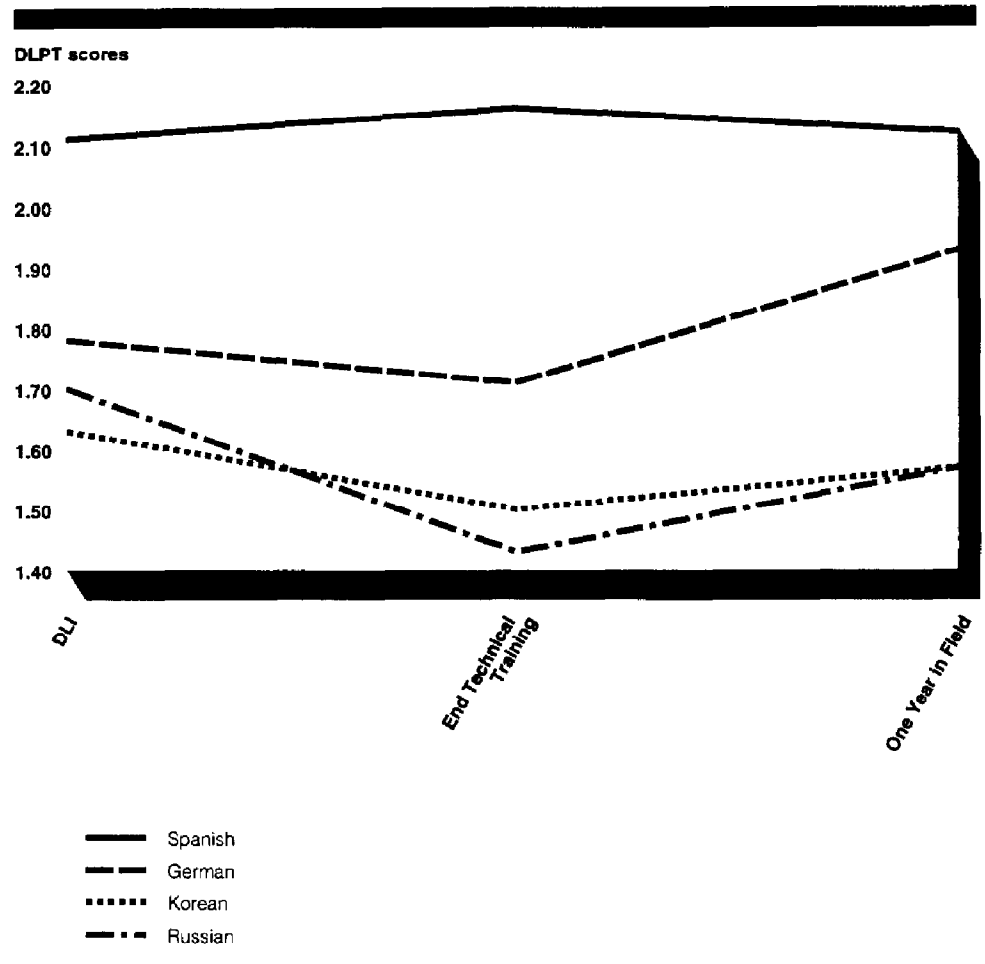


Figure 2: Reading Proficiency Lost While Attending Technical Training School

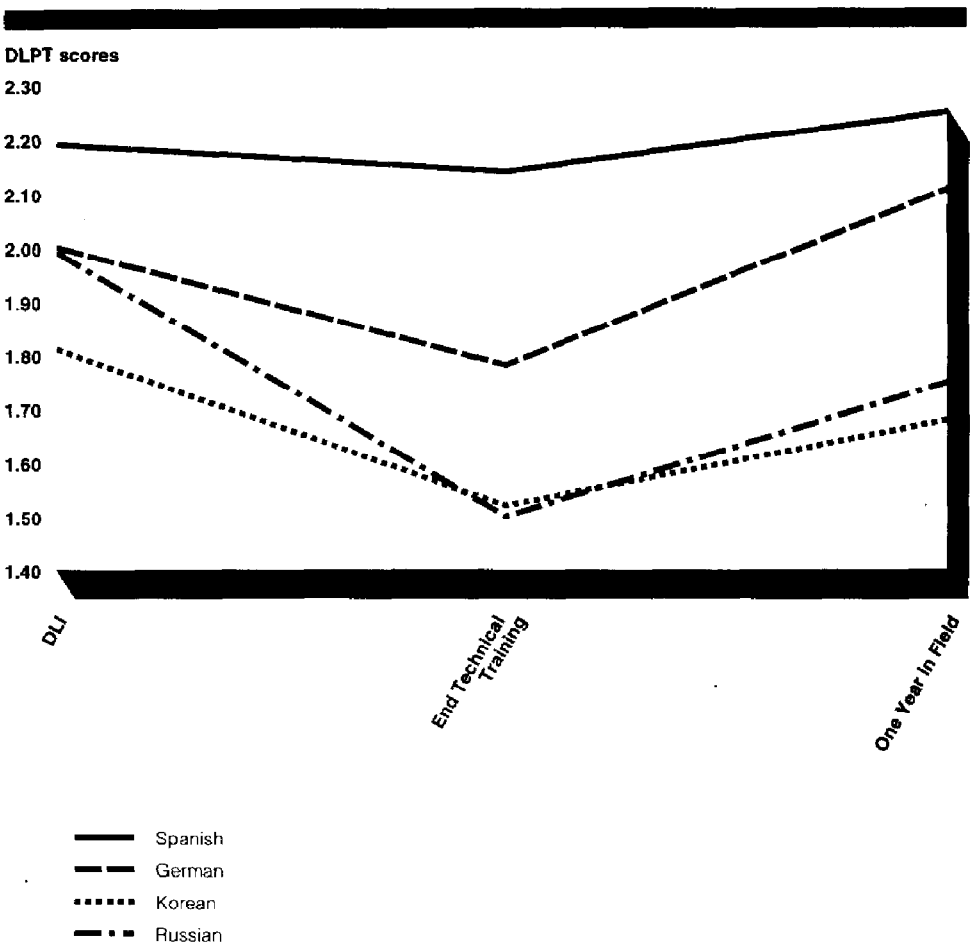
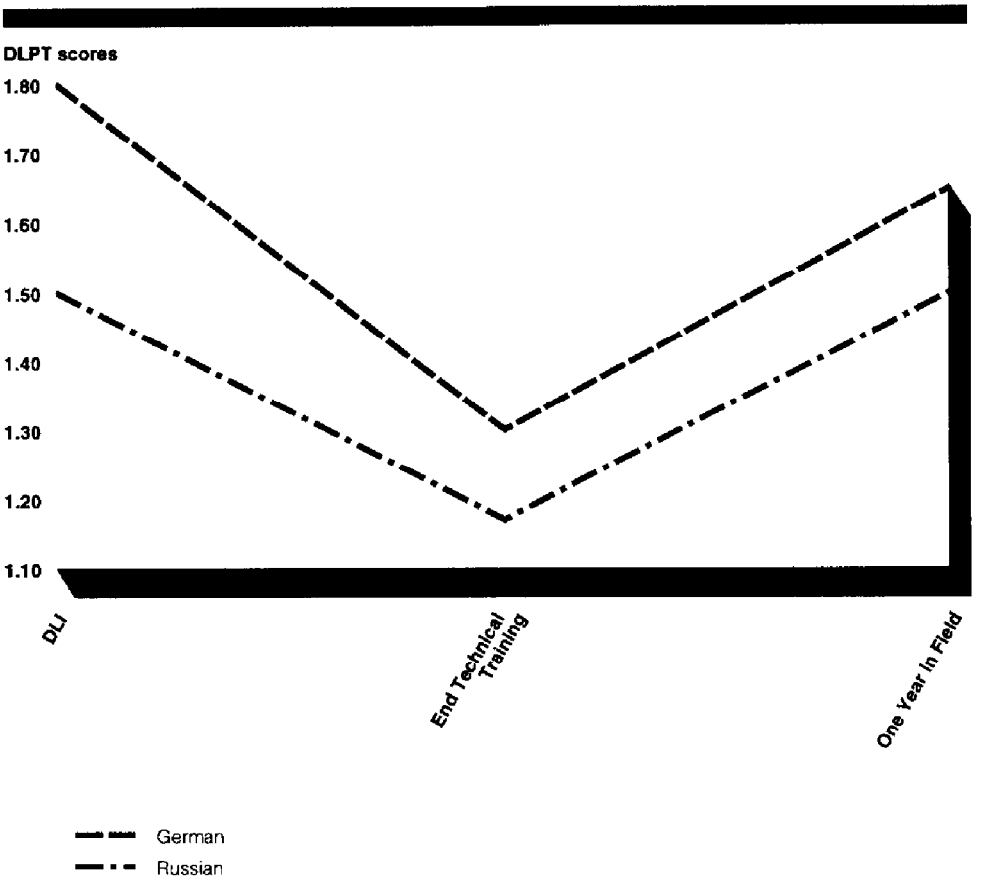


Figure 3: Speaking Proficiency Lost While Attending Technical Training School



Unit Level Language Maintenance Programs Not Uniformly Implemented

Unit-level language maintenance programs, known as command language programs, are intended to provide linguists with opportunities to maintain or improve their language proficiency once assigned to an operational unit. Although all services have some form of command language program, only the Army has a formal regulation that requires unit commanders to establish a program. In the other services, there are no formal regulations that mandate the establishment of language programs, and the decision to establish a program is left to the discretion of the unit commander.

To support readiness objectives, Army Regulation 611-6 requires commanders of major Army commands to establish a command language program and provide on- and-off duty training to maintain language skills at the level 2 proficiency. According to an official from the Office of the Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, the Army recently drafted a revision to its unit status reporting regulation, Army Regulation 220-1,

which will make linguist proficiency—as measured by DLPT scores—a reportable item on unit status reports. Army officials believe this revision will emphasize the need for unit commanders to provide more language training to their linguists.

The Navy has had formal command language programs since the 1970s. However, the Navy programs focused largely on improving familiarity with technical or job-related language skills and not increasing global language proficiency levels. However, with the increased emphasis on global language skills, the Navy is now including more global language training in its command language programs.

Although the Air Force has command language programs, it is just now developing a regulation that formally requires all Air Force units with linguists to establish a program. The Air Force has not yet finalized its command language program regulation.

The Marine Corps has command language programs at commands that maintain the preponderance of linguists. However, Marine Corps unit commanders do not have funds specifically designated for language training, and language training must compete for funds with other training requirements. Therefore, Marine Corps unit commanders rely heavily on external organizations to train their linguists at little or no cost.

The degree to which unit commanders implement language programs varies by unit from extensive, formal programs to nominal efforts. Two joint service and one Army unit we visited had designated language training officers as well as facilities equipped with modern instructional technology, such as a satellite video telecommunications system known as Video Tele-Training, and foreign television programming acquired through Satellite Communications for Learning terminals. These units also arranged for classroom instruction with instructors from local commercial language schools or universities. At the other end of the spectrum, we visited several units where the language maintenance training resources focused primarily on developing mission-related skills instead of global language skills. Unlike the programs above, these units used language material obtained during operational missions as the language source for their language maintenance training sessions.

The Army's command language program at I Corps, Fort Lewis, Washington, is an example of how a program can contribute to increasing linguist language proficiency levels. For example, from 1984 to 1993, the

percentage of linguists that attained and maintained at least a level 2 proficiency increased from 6 to over 50 percent. I Corps officials attribute the increase to the program having a full-time civilian language coordinator to provide consistent long-term oversight of the program, a centralized facility, a stable budget, and sustained command emphasis on language training. The I Corps program uses modern technology in its program, including interactive video, computers, Video Tele-Training, and Satellite Communications for Learning terminals. The total cost of this program for fiscal year 1993 was about $500,000 and served about 1,500 linguists.

In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD agreed that command language programs are essential to maintain and improve language proficiency. In this regard, it indicated that Defense Planning Guidance for Fiscal Years 1996-2001 directs service components to identify resources for command language programs.

Incentive Pay Awarded for Less Than Level 2 Proficiency

The Foreign Language Proficiency Pay program is DOD's program to encourage linguists to achieve higher language proficiency levels. DOD Instruction 7280.3 authorizes monthly payments to linguists who are proficient in a foreign language the Secretary of Defense identifies as being necessary for national defense considerations or for which there may be a critical need. The instruction authorizes the service secretaries to award proficiency pay on the basis of language category and level of proficiency achieved, but limits the amount of incentive pay available to $100 per month.

We found that the Army and Marine Corps award proficiency pay to some linguists in the more difficult languages who had not achieved a level 2 proficiency. The services justified these payments because of the difficulty in learning and maintaining the language at level 2.

Proficiency Pay Not Awarded Equally to Linguists Who Met or Exceeded Standard

Proficiency pay is awarded based on the language category and the proficiency level achieved. However, because of the difference in criticality of the language to each service, the services do not award proficiency pay at the same rate as the other services. As shown in table 3, this leads to not all linguists receiving the same level of proficiency pay for the same level of achievement. For example, the Navy and Marine Corps award proficiency pay to level 2 linguists in category I and II languages. In contrast, for category I languages, the Army and Air Force do not award

proficiency pay until the linguists achieve above a level 2 proficiency. Further, the Air Force does not award proficiency pay to category II linguists until they achieve more than a level 2 proficiency. In fact, of the 14 combinations of language proficiency and difficulty for which the services currently award proficiency pay, the services only concurred four times.

Table 3: Monthly Foreign Language Proficiency Pay Schedule by Service

Proficiency level	Service	Category I	Category II	Category III	Category IV
1+	Army	0	0	$25	$50
	Navy	0	0	0	0
	Air Force	0	0	0	0
	Marines	0	0	25	50
2	Army	0	$50	50	75
	Navy	$25	25	50	50
	Air Force	0	0	50	50
	Marines	25	50	50	75
2+	Army	50	75	75	100
	Navy	50	50	75	75
	Air Force	75	75	75	75
	Marines	50	75	75	75
3	Army	75	100	100	100
	Navy	75	75	100	100
	Air Force	100	100	100	100
	Marines	75	100	100	100

Training Funds Can Be Saved by Coordinating Class Schedules

DOD misses the opportunity to save training funds by allowing two of its primary language training schools—the National Cryptologic School and the Contract Foreign Language Training Program—to acquire commercial language training without coordinating their class schedules. The National Cryptologic School and Contract Foreign Language Training Program both acquire commercial language training from schools in the Washington/Baltimore metropolitan area. Many of the classes potentially duplicate classes acquired by the other school, with each school often having classes with one or two students. According to officials at both schools, there is no procedure that requires them to coordinate their training class schedules, and neither school had placed students in classes managed by the other school for the past several years.

We analyzed National Cryptologic School and Contract Foreign Language Training Program basic language training classes acquired through commercial contracts for fiscal years 1988 through 1992 and found that both schools trained students in some of the same languages each year.

Table 4 shows the common language courses acquired by both the National Cryptologic School and Contract Foreign Language Training Program for fiscal years 1988 to 1992.

Table 4: Common Languages Taught by Both the National Cryptologic School and Contract Foreign Language Training Program Under Commercial Contracts for Fiscal Years 1988 Through 1992

Fiscal year	Common languages
1988	Afrikaans, Chinese Mandarin, Greek, Italian, Romanian, Serbo-Croatian, Thai
1989	Dutch, French, Greek, Hungarian, Japanese, Laotian, Norwegian, Romanian, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish, Thai
1990	Bulgarian, French, German, Hungarian, Lingalan, Portuguese, Romanian, Thai, Urdu
1991	Afrikaans, Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese Mandarin, Danish, Dutch, German, Greek, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Romanian, Serbo-Croatian, Somali, Spanish, Thai, Urdu
1992	Arabic, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Hindi, Korean, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish, Thai, Turkish, Urdu

Of the 16 languages for which the National Cryptologic School and Contract Foreign Language Training Program each acquired commercial language training courses in fiscal year 1992, we calculated that there were potentially 10 classes that could have been saved if DOD had combined the basic language training classes of these two schools. In calculating potential savings, we assumed that all students in a language started class at the same time and that all classes consisted of a maximum of six students. We capped the class size at six students based on a DLI official's opinion that this represents the maximum number of students who could be taught while still allowing for maximum interaction between teacher and student. We also assumed that each class had 1,500 hours of instruction at a cost of $30 per hour. Using these assumptions, we calculated the cost of a class to be $45,000. Thus, the possible savings achieved by eliminating these 10 extra classes in fiscal year 1992 would have been about $450,000.

We also found that using the same contractor, the two schools negotiated different hourly rates for the same language instruction. For the 16 languages contracted for by both schools, the National Cryptologic School hourly cost for instruction was $2.25 more than the hourly cost negotiated by the Contract Foreign Language Training Program.

Recommendations

We recommend the Secretary of Defense

- review individual service practices for awarding foreign language proficiency pay to determine whether all linguists should receive equal pay for equal achievement and determine whether the current Army and Marine Corps practice of paying for less than level 2 proficiency should continue and
- direct the Secretary of the Army and the Director of the National Security Agency to establish procedures for coordinating commercial language training class schedules.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

DOD fully concurred with the report recommendations and advised us of additional actions planned to deal with language proficiency pay and training matters addressed in our report recommendations. According to DOD, it plans to (1) initiate shortly a detailed study of the foreign language proficiency pay program and (2) work more closely with other members of the Intelligence Community to coordinate language training requirements and share training resources.

DOD also fully concurred in all but one of the report's six findings. In this regard, DOD took exception to GAO characterizing as a standard, rather than a goal, the General Officer Steering Committee position that students should achieve a level 2 language proficiency upon graduation from DLI. We agree with the DOD's comments and have revised the report accordingly.

Appendix II contains DOD's official comments to this report.

Scope and Methodology

The original scope of this review was to include all intelligence linguists in the federal government. However, due to the unexpectedly large numbers within this group, we limited our review to DOD linguists.

We met with agency officials at each of the service intelligence commands and the National Security Agency to discuss language training procedures and policies and reviewed agency documents regarding training requirements and standards. We observed actual language training classes in process, both in a classroom environment and over a satellite communications network system. We also visited several operating units that used linguists to review their unit language training programs.

We conducted our review from April 1992 to September 1993 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

We are sending copies of this report to the Secretaries of Defense, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force; the Director of the National Security Agency; appropriate congressional committees; and other interested parties on request.

Please contact me at (202) 512-3504 if you or your staff have any questions on this report. Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix III.

Sincerely yours,

Richard Davis
Director, National Security
Analysis

Contents

Letter 1

Appendix I Language Training Schools 20

Appendix II Comments From the Department of Defense 23

Appendix III Major Contributors to This Report 31

Tables

Table 1: Federal Language Proficiency Standards 3
Table 2: Improved DLI Training Proficiency 5
Table 3: Monthly Foreign Language Proficiency Pay Schedule by Service 13
Table 4: Common Languages Taught by Both the National Cryptologic School and Contract Foreign Language Training Program Under Commercial Contracts for Fiscal Years 1988 Through 1992 14
Table I.1: Language Course Lengths by Language Category 20

Figures

Figure 1: Listening Proficiency Lost While Attending Technical Training School 8
Figure 2: Reading Proficiency Lost While Attending Technical Training School 9
Figure 3: Speaking Proficiency Lost While Attending Technical Training School 10

Abbreviations

DLI	Defense Language Institute
DLPT	Defense Language Proficiency Test
DOD	Department of Defense
HUMINT	human intelligence
NSA	National Security Agency
SIGINT	signals intelligence

Language Training Schools

Language Instruction

Depending on the language, all students attend basic language classes for 25 to 63 weeks to obtain a limited working level proficiency in the target language. Languages are divided into four categories, each representing the difficulty a native English speaker has when learning the foreign language. Category I languages, such as Spanish and French, are considered the easiest languages to learn. Category IV languages, such as Arabic and Chinese, are the hardest to learn. Table I.1 shows the length of typical DOD language training courses for each language category.

Table I.1: Language Course Lengths by Language Category

Language category	Course length	Language
I	25 weeks	Afrikaans, Danish, Dutch, French, Haitian-Creole, Icelandic, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili, Swedish
II	34 weeks	German, Hindi, Indonesian, Romanian, Urdu
III	47 weeks	Albanian, Amharic, Bengali, Bulgarian, Burmese, Cambodian, Czechoslovakian, Finnish, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Laotian, Persian-Farsi, Polish, Pushto, Russian, Serbo-Croation, Somali, Tagalog, Thai, Turkish, Vietnamese
IV	47-63 weeks	Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean

Defense Foreign Language Program

The Defense Foreign Language Program consists of all foreign language training programs conducted by, or under contract to, DOD components except: (1) those conducted at the National Security Agency/Central Security Service, (2) training provided to cadets and midshipmen at service academies, and (3) training taken by individuals strictly for the purpose of voluntary personal development or obtaining academic credit. Language training for military linguists is conducted under the auspices of the Defense Foreign Language Program. The Secretary of the Army is the executive agent for the program but assigned the responsibility for language training for military linguists to the Defense Language Institute (DLI).

Language training for National Security Agency (NSA) civilians is conducted at the National Cryptologic School at Fort Meade, Maryland. Within the National Cryptologic School, the Chief of the Language Training Division is responsible for foreign language acquisition, as well as linguistics, testing, proficiency-based methods, maintenance training, and specialized instruction for NSA civilians and analysts and military linguists assigned to NSA.

Defense Language Institute

DLI is DOD's primary foreign language training school and is a field activity under the Commanding General of the Army's Training and Doctrine Command. DLI is responsible for conducting, supervising, and exercising technical control of foreign language training in the Defense Foreign Language Program. DLI's goal is to train signals intelligence (SIGINT) students to a limited working proficiency (level 2) in listening and reading language skills and an elementary proficiency (level 1) in speaking skills, as measured against the Federal Interagency Language Roundtable standards. DLI's goal for training human intelligence (HUMINT) students is a level 2 in all three language skills.

DLI foreign language instruction focuses on "global" (conversational) language, and courses are designed to create or improve general language proficiency. According to a DLI official, DLI teaches interactive skills and develops proficiency in language skills that are necessary to get the "big picture" in times of crisis. DLI officials also believe global language skills provide the linguist with a better base to understand the nonmilitary communications that are found at some operating units.

In fiscal year 1992, DLI spent about $72.5 million to train about 4,000 linguists in 56 languages at the Defense Language Institute's two branches in Monterey, California, and Washington D.C. About 3,500 students were trained in 24 languages in residence courses taught at DLI's Monterey facility. DLI's Contract Foreign Language Training Program, located in Washington, D.C., arranges training in 32 languages for about 500 DOD linguists a year at government language schools such as the State Department's Foreign Service Institute or at commercial language schools.

Fort Ord currently provides the base operations support to DLI at Monterey. With the planned closure of Fort Ord in fiscal year 1996, Army officials estimate that the cost to provide the base operations support now provided by Fort Ord could increase the cost to operate DLI's Monterey facility by as much as $32 million a year.

DLI Provides Language Training Support to Operational Units

DLI provides language maintenance training support to field units through several media such as Video Tele-Training system, audio tapes, and language books. The Video Tele-Training system is a satellite based two-way video teleconferencing system that enables instructors located at DLI to interact in a classroom setting with linguists stationed at field sites. There are two broadcast facilities currently at DLI, with plans to install four more. DOD plans to install remote terminals at over 62 field units to provide advanced and maintenance training to linguists at the field units.

National Cryptologic School

The National Cryptologic School is the National Security Agency's (NSA) training component. The National Cryptologic School develops and executes education and training in eight basic curricula: language, cryptanalysis, traffic analysis, SIGINT reporting, area studies, collection management, combined cryptologic skills, and communications skills. The School's Chief of Language Training Division is responsible for providing cryptologic language training and enhancement in African, Asian, European, and Middle East languages at all proficiency skill levels, as well as linguistics, testing, proficiency-based methods, maintenance training, and specialized instruction of NSA civilians and military personnel assigned to NSA.

Most National Cryptologic School Basic Language Instruction Conducted at Commercial Schools

The National Cryptologic School courses provide global language training in required foreign languages. The school only teaches a few basic language courses in-house and contracts most of its basic language training courses to commercial language schools. From fiscal years 1988 to 1992, the National Cryptologic School provided in-house basic foreign language instruction to 100 NSA civilians in five languages. During the same 5 fiscal years, the school also acquired basic language training courses from commercial contractors for 502 NSA civilians in 64 languages, including the 5 languages that were taught in-house.

According to a National Cryptologic School official, the school's goal is to train NSA civilians to do a job, not to obtain a specific language proficiency level. However, the school's goal for its basic language courses is to provide students with a level 2 global language proficiency. For advance language courses, the school's goal is to provide civilians with the language skills they need to become a level 3.

Comments From the Department of Defense

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
6000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-6000

June 15, 1994

Mr. Frank C. Conahan
Assistant Comptroller General
National Security and International
Affairs Division
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Conahan:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the General Accounting Office (GAO) draft report "INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES: Many DoD Linguists Do Not Meet Minimum Language Proficiency Standards," dated March 15, 1994 (GAO Code 395201), OSD Case 9637-X. The Department generally concurs with the report.

Although the DoD agrees with most of the report, as discussed in the enclosure, the GAO has incorrectly described the graduation standards for the Defense Language Institute, stating that obtaining a proficiency Level II on the Defense Language Proficiency Test is a criteria for graduation. That is not a graduation criterion. A Defense Language Institute diploma means that the recipient has met the grading standards of the courses taken. Just as every graduating lawyer does not pass the bar exam, not every Defense Language Institute graduate passes the proficiency test.

The DoD is restructuring the management of the Defense Foreign Language Program, and will examine proficiency pay in a detailed study to be initiated by October 1994, as part of the restructuring. The foreign language training community formed the Center for the Advancement of Language Learning in 1992. The main objective of the Center is to coordinate foreign language training programs and developmental activities.

The detailed DoD comments on the report findings and recommendations are provided in the enclosure. The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft report.

Sincerely,

for Emmett Paige, Jr. (Acting)

Enclosure

GAO-DRAFT REPORT - DATED MARCH 15, 1994
(GAO CODE 395201) OSD CASE 9637-X

"INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES: MANY DOD LINGUISTS DO NOT MEET MINIMUM LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY STANDARDS"

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS

* * * * *

FINDINGS

FINDING A: The DoD Intelligence Linguist Workforce and Training. The GAO reported that the DoD intelligence linguist workforce consists of approximately 18,500 military and civilian linguists trained in over 56 languages. The GAO noted that most DoD linguists are engaged in either signals intelligence or human intelligence activities. The GAO explained that signal intelligence linguists collect intelligence information by intercepting, translating, and analyzing electronic voice communications, while human intelligence linguists debrief people, screen and translate foreign language materials, serve as translators, and in wartime, interrogate prisoners of war and exploit captured documents.

The GAO reported that the DoD measures language proficiency--defined as the ability to communicate in the foreign language using listening, reading, and speaking skills--against standards established by the Federal Interagency Language Roundtable. The GAO noted that the roundtable standards measure proficiency at six different levels, for proficiency level zero (no practical ability) to proficiency Level V (functional native ability). The GAO further reported the the General Officer Steering Committee established the Level II standard as the minimum language proficiency required for military linguists to graduate from language school. (pp. 1-6/GAO Draft Report)

Now on pp. 2-3.

DOD RESPONSE: Partially concur. The GAO incorrectly described the graduation requirements for the Defense Language Institute. The General Officer Steering Committee recommended the establishment of a goal that 80 percent of the graduates of the Defense Language Institute obtain a proficiency Level II on graduation. That goal, however, is not a graduation requirement. Proficiency Level II was further identified as the minimum proficiency level required for follow-on intelligence training. Waiver procedures were established for those graduating, but not achieving the proficiency standard.

FINDING B: Language Proficiency Standards Not Met By Many Defense Language Institute Graduates. The GAO reported that depending on the language category, the DoD sends linguists to the Defense Language Institute for 25 to 63 weeks to learn foreign languages to

a Level II proficiency. The GAO asserted that, unlike other academic standards to graduate, military linguists do not have to meet the mandated Level II proficiency standard to graduate from the Defense Language Institute. The GAO found that the data shows that in FY 1992, only 69 percent of the linguists met the signal intelligence proficiency requirement, and only 50 percent of the graduates met the human intelligence proficiency requirement. The GAO also found that the Defense Language Institute regulations do not mandate that linguists achieve a Level II to receive a diploma, rather the diploma only certifies that linguists have completed a language training course and taken the Defense Language Proficiency Test.

- Graduates Only Meeting Minimum Proficiency Standards. The GAO reported that the General Officer Steering Committee assigned the Defense Language Institute the goal of graduating at least 80 percent of all linguists at the Level II proficiency or higher to increase the overall proficiency of the linguist workforce. The GAO concluded that, while the Defense Language Institute has not achieved that goal, it has significantly increased the number of linguists graduating at the Level II or higher. The GAO pointed out that, according to the Defense Language Institute data, linguists meeting the signal intelligence proficiency standard increased from 29 percent in FY 1985 to 69 percent in FY 1992. The GAO also pointed out that for the same years, linguists graduating at the human intelligence proficiency standard increased from about 13 percent to 50 percent. The GAO noted that the Defense Language Institute hopes to further increase the percentage of graduates at the Level II or higher by continually modifying instructional methodologies or course curriculums.

- Service Waivers System. The GAO reported that the Service waiver system allows linguists to graduate below Level II. The GAO found that although attainment of a Level II proficiency is the Cryptologic Training System prerequisite for signal intelligence linguists to enter technical training school, most Services routinely waive that requirement. The GAO explained that the Cryptologic Training Manager established the waiver system in 1989 to avoid unacceptable attrition rates in the training system. The GAO pointed out that according to the Cryptologic Training System representative at the Defense Language Institute, since FY 1991, the Army began to tighten up on the number of non-Level II linguists who got a waiver. The GAO found, however, for FY 1991 and FY 1992 the Army granted waivers to about 70 percent of its non-Level II graduates. The GAO also noted that Service officials from the Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps indicated that students who do not achieve a Level II proficiency will get a waiver. (pp. 6-9/GAO Draft Report)

Now on pp. 4-6.

DOD RESPONSE: Concur. To graduate from the Defense Language Institute, students must meet defined academic standards; additionally, the Defense Language Institute tests its graduates by having them take a standardized independent proficiency test upon completion of their course of study. Measuring the output against

a proficiency standard is an evaluation not even attempted by other language education institutions. Statistics show that the proficiency of the Defense Language Institute basic course graduates exceeds that of language majors graduating from colleges, universities, and contract language programs. The waiver system was put in place fully recognizing that the goal was 80 percent, and the remaining 20 percent had to be evaluated prior to going on to further training.

FINDING C: Language Proficiency Deteriorates During Technical Training School. The GAO reported that after language school, military linguists attend technical training school to learn the fundamental technical skills needed to conduct the mission. The GAO found that during technical school--signal intelligence linguists learn how to intercept and extract intelligence information from foreign electronic voice communications and human intelligence linguists learn how to obtain intelligence information from human and other sources. The GAO added that while both type of linguists are exposed to the foreign language equivalent of technical and mission-specific terms during technical training, according to technical school officials, global language training is not an integral part of their technical training programs.

The GAO reported that DoD studies, conducted in 1985 and 1992, indicate that during technical training school, linguists experience a temporary loss of their global language proficiency because intensive language training is not part of the technical school curriculum. The GAO pointed out that a joint Army Research Institute and the Defense Language Institute study showed that linguists temporarily lose up to 25 percent of their language proficiency while attending technical school. The GAO added that a 1992 follow-up study conducted under a contract sponsored by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, using the data from the 1985 study, found that about 30 percent of the linguists did not regain the proficiency lost during technical school. (pp. 9-11/GAO Draft Report)

Now on pp. 6-7.

DOD RESPONSE: Concur. The only way to prevent proficiency loss during follow-on technical training would be to extend course lengths to include global language skills maintenance training. The current resource climate will not support an extension of course lengths to include global language maintenance training.

FINDING D: Unit Level Language Maintenance Programs Not Uniformly Implemented. The GAO reported that unit-level language maintenance programs, known as command language programs, are intended to provide the linguist with opportunities to maintain or improve their language proficiency once assigned to an operational unit. The GAO found that while all the Services have some form of command language program, currently, only the Army has a formal regulation that requires unit commanders to establish a program. The GAO pointed out the other Services have no formal regulations that

mandate the establishment of language programs, and the decision to establish a program is left to the discretion of the unit commander.

The GAO reported that the Army command language program at I Corps, Fort Lewis, Washington, is an example of how a program can contribute to increasing linguists language proficiency levels. The GAO noted that for example, from 1984 to 1993, the percent of linguists that attained and maintained at least a Level II proficiency increased from six to over 50 percent. The GAO also noted that the I Corps officials attribute the increase to the program having a fulltime civilian language coordinator to provide consistent long-term oversight of the program, a centralized facility, a stable budget, and sustained command emphasis on language training. The GAO found that the I Corps program uses modern technology in the program, including interactive video, computers, Video Tele-Training, and Satellite Communications for Learning terminals. The GAO pointed out that the total cost of the program for FY 1993 was about $500,000 and served about 1,500 linguists. (pp. 11-13/GAO Draft Report)

Now on pp. 10-12.

DOD RESPONSE: Concur. Command language programs are essential to maintain and improve global language proficiency. The Defense Planning Guidance for FY 1996-2001 directs components to identify resources for such activities. The Defense Language Institute is working with the Services to standardize the programs. Command language programs will be addressed as part of the realignment of the Defense Foreign Language Program. Estimated completion date is the fourth quarter of FY 1994.

FINDING E: Incentive Pay Awarded For Less Than Level II Proficiency. The GAO reported that the Foreign Language Proficiency Pay program is the DoD program to encourage linguists to achieve higher language proficiency levels. The GAO observed that DoD Instruction 7280.3 authorizes monthly payments to linguists who are proficient in a foreign language the Secretary of Defense identifies as being necessary for national defense considerations, or for which there may be a critical need. The GAO noted that the instruction authorized the Service Secretaries to award proficiency pay on the basis of language category and level of proficiency achieved, but limited the amount of incentive pay available to $100 per month.

The GAO found that even though the General Officer Steering Committee established Level II as the minimum language proficiency required to graduate from language school, the Army and Marine Corps awarded proficiency pay to some linguists in the more difficult languages who have not achieved a Level II proficiency. The GAO explained that the Services justified the payment because of the difficulty in learning and maintaining the language at the Level II.

The GAO observed that proficiency pay is awarded based on the language category and the proficiency level achieved. The GAO found, however, because of the difference in criticality of the language to each Service, the Services do not award proficiency pay at the same rate. The GAO reported that (1) the Navy and Marine Corps award proficiency pay to Level II linguists in category I and II languages, (2) for category I languages, the Army and Air Force do not award proficiency pay until the linguists achieve above a Level II proficiency, and (3) the Air Force does not award proficiency pay to Category II linguists until they achieve more than a Level II proficiency. The GAO found that, in fact, of the 14 combinations of language proficiency and difficulty for which the Services currently award proficiency pay, the Services only concurred four times. (pp. 14-15/GAO Draft Report)

Now on pp. 12-13.

DOD RESPONSE: Concur. Level II proficiency is not a graduation requirement for the Defense Language Institute. Under current DoD procedures, proficiency pay may be paid to proficiency levels less than Level II. That policy will be examined in a detailed study of proficiency pay once the reorganization of the Defense Foreign Language Program is completed. The study will be initiated on or about October 1, 1994.

FINDING F: Training Funds Can Be Saved By Coordinating Class Schedules. The GAO concluded that the DoD misses the opportunity to save training funds by allowing two of its primary language training schools--the National Cryptologic School and the Contract Foreign Language Training Program--to acquire commercial language training without coordinating class schedules. The GAO explained that the National Cryptologic School and Contract Foreign Language Training Program both acquire commercial language training from schools in the Washington/Baltimore metropolitan area. The GAO noted that many of the classes potentially duplicate classes acquired by the other school, with each school often having classes with one or two students. The GAO reported that, according to officials at both schools, there is no procedure that requires coordinating training class schedules, and neither school had placed students in classes managed by the other school for the past several years.

The GAO analyzed the National Cryptologic School and Contract Foreign Language Training Program basic language training classes acquired through commercial contracts for FY 1988-1992 and found that both schools trained linguists in some of the same languages each year. The GAO determined that there were potentially ten classes that could have been saved if the DoD had combined the basic language training classes of the two schools. The GAO reported that based on their assumptions, possible savings of $450,000 could be achieved by eliminating the ten extra classes in FY 1992. The GAO also found that at a common contractor, the two schools negotiated different hourly rates for language instruction. (pp. 15-18/GAO Draft Report)

Now on pp. 13-14.

DOD RESPONSE: Concur. A significant effort is being made to coordinate foreign language training opportunities. All foreign language training organizations supporting the Intelligence Community are participating members of the Center for the Advancement of Language Learning--one of its major activities is the coordination of training requirements. It should be recognized, however, that while in some cases the language may be the same, the desired learning outcome or student background may be entirely different.

* * * * *

RECOMMENDATIONS

Now on p. 15.

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense review individual Service practices for awarding foreign language proficiency pay to determine whether all linguists should receive equal pay for equal achievement. (p. 18/GAO Draft Report)

DOD RESPONSE: Concur. In the DoD submission to the FY 1994 Intelligence Authorization Act, a revised foreign language proficiency pay system was proposed for both active and reserve components. The DoD proposal featured significantly higher pay levels, with eligibility beginning at Language Proficiency Level II, but with increased amounts being paid for higher proficiency levels and multi-language qualification. The provision was not adopted; however, the Defense Authorization Act of 1994 directed a detailed study of Foreign Language Proficiency Pay and authorized a test program. A reorganization of the Defense Foreign Language Program has been proposed. When the proposal is approved, the proficiency pay study will be initiated. Estimated start date for the proficiency pay study is October 1994, with completion of the study expected by September 1995.

Now on p. 15.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense determine whether the current Army and Marine Corps practice of paying for less than Level II proficiency should continue. (p. 18/GAO Draft Report)

DOD RESPONSE: Concur. Service proficiency pay practices are being conducted as authorized in the current DoD Instruction. When the proficiency pay study discussed in the DoD response to Recommendation 1 is completed, current procedures will be changed, as necessary.

Now on p. 15.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army and the Director of the National Security Agency to establish procedures for coordinating commercial language training class schedules. (p. 18 GAO/Draft Report)

DOD RESPONSE: Concur. Procedures have now been established to coordinate commercial class schedules. The National Security Agency and the Defense Language Institute are both member organizations of the Center for the Advancement of Language Learning, a joint enterprise of the Intelligence Community. A major focus of the organization is the coordination of training requirements. Under current procedures, member organizations coordinate both resident and commercial class schedules and share training resources.

Major Contributors to This Report

National Security and International Affairs Division, Washington, D.C.

Gary K. Weeter, Assistant Director
Richard H. Yeh, Evaluator-in-Charge
Cynthia A. Steed, Senior Evaluator

Ordering Information

The first copy of each GAO report and testimony is free. Additional copies are $2 each. Orders should be sent to the following address, accompanied by a check or money order made out to the Superintendent of Documents, when necessary. Orders for 100 or more copies to be mailed to a single address are discounted 25 percent.

Orders by mail:

U.S. General Accounting Office
P.O. Box 6015
Gaithersburg, MD 20884-6015

or visit:

Room 1100
700 4th St. NW (corner of 4th and G Sts. NW)
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, DC

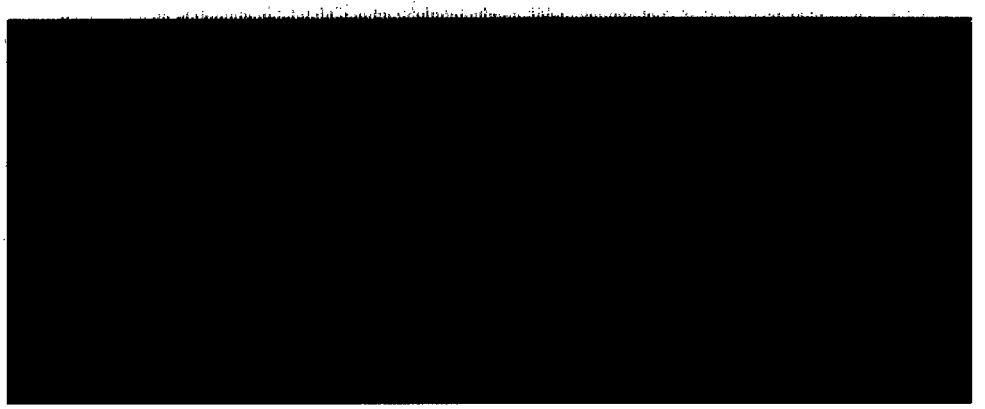
Orders may also be placed by calling (202) 512-6000 or by using fax number (301) 258-4066.

Each day, GAO issues a list of newly available reports and testimony. To receive facsimile copies of the daily list or any list from the past 30 days, please call (301) 258-4097 using a touchtone phone. A recorded menu will provide information on how to obtain these lists.

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548-0001

Bulk Mail
Postage & Fees Paid
GAO
Permit No. G100

Official Business
Penalty for Private Use $300

Address Correction Requested