

AFEHRI File 100.002

Research Materials/Source Documents  
STUDENT PAPERS

FILE TITLE: Trends in Air Force Enlisted Recruiting 1945-1994

AUTHOR: SMSgt J. A. Trudo, 26 Feb 1994

Reviewed by:

AFEHRI Representative G.R. Akin date 5 DEC 97

EPC Representative Ken Cole date 20 Jun 98

Scanner Operator Sung Jodan date 23 Jan 98

APPROVED BY:

Gary R. Akin

GARY R. AKIN, CMSgt, USAF

Director

Air Force Enlisted Heritage Research Institute

19-11  
J.L.N.

## BACKGROUND PAPER

ON

### TRENDS IN AIR FORCE ENLISTED RECRUITING 1945-1994

The end of World War II brought with it not only widespread relief that the biggest war in human history was over, but also the realization that the incentive for young men to serve their country in a military capacity might be affected. America was, for the moment, free of the threat of attack by any foreign power. Officers and enlisted men, anxious to get on with their lives after four years of war, were leaving military service in droves. No longer could the military branches be assured of a steady stream of qualified volunteers. In short, the focus of recruiting and retaining qualified enlisted members had to change in order to keep pace with developing social changes and the changing expectations of potential recruits. This held true not only during the 1945-1973 period but also during and after the inception of the all-volunteer force in 1973. Both of those time periods will be examined here.

The Army Air Force (AAF) recognized early on that demobilization had left the AAF critically short of trained specialists and technicians. Whereas manpower had been plentiful during the war years, by 1946 Lieutenant General Ira Eaker, the Deputy Commander of Army Air Forces, saw the advantages of recruiting higher quality enlistees. His 1946 policy letter on recruiting so stated: "The AAF needs intelligent, high type three-year enlistees. Every effort must be made to obtain quality instead of quantity. Mental and physical examinations must be fairly and impartially administered. Unqualified personnel are not desired or needed in the AAF." (14:4) The term "quality" translated into "education," and as early as 1942 the Army's plans for reserve enlistment of college students for deferred service was based on the premise that "the enlistment of reservists with continuance of education (is approved) in the belief that this education will develop capacities for leadership and will furnish opportunity for acquiring special knowledge which will

SMSgt Trudo/HQ AFSPC/INXY/4-3673/jat/26 Feb 94

be important factors in determining qualifications for admission to Officers' Candidate Schools.

(5:2)

Recruiting policies of the time called for the recruiting efforts to "...be centralized in one office in all major air commands and subordinate units." (15:1) This was intended to avoid duplication of effort and to increase recruiting support. Recognizing that technical training was a powerful inducement for enlistments, the AAF established a program where selected high school graduates could choose, apply and qualify for technical training prior to enlistment. (16:1) Once motivated to enlist, recruits were given the option of staying for eighteen months, two years, or three years. Those opting for a three-year enlistment incurred the additional reward of a choice of assignment. (24:2) The three-year enlistee was seen as "...our career soldier upon whom we will depend in future years for the efficient operation of the AAF." (14:1)

Former enlisted members were not ignored in the recruiting effort. A recruiting pamphlet of the time stressed the following incentives to those grown weary of the fight for jobs in the post-war demobilization:

- "Food, clothing, quarters, medical and dental care FREE.
- Dependency benefits continued for any enlistment begun before 1 July 1946.
- Transportation of dependents and household goods for men of first three grades.
- Post facilities, commissaries, and post exchanges.
- No income tax.
- Present pay rates continued, including 20 percent for overseas service, longevity, etc.
- Eligibility for G. I. Bill of Rights still yours if you enlist before 6 October 1946.
- Certain former servicemen on active duty can attend school under G. I. Bill of Rights now.
- Educational opportunities at AAF Technical Schools in radar, radio, airplane maintenance, photography, weather, and many others.
- Off-duty training through USAFI.
- 30-day furlough each year with pay." (3:2)

Retirement pay, always an important incentive, ranged from \$32.50 a month for a private to \$89.70 a month for a master sergeant in 1946. Thirty-year retirees could expect \$56.25 to \$155.25, respectively. (3:2) A pamphlet released later that same year focused on travel opportunities, job security, and a chance to "earn while you learn." As a further inducement to those who may not have quite made up their minds, a more liberal extension policy was

implemented, and those who separated more than three months previously (but after 11 May 1945) were for the first time allowed to rejoin provided they do so for a period of three years. (4:1)

Within a year the recruiting focus shifted from a "defensive" approach to one of "prestige." This subtle yet effective campaign was initiated by the Sixth Army. No longer would the AAF allow itself to beg for recruits. According to a U.S. Army Recruiting Service Letter of the time,

"... the objective is to implant in every prospect's mind the question, "Am I qualified?" rather than "Do I want to join?" All activities will be keyed to this objective....

In all their official relations with prospects, the interviewers attempt to determine the prospective enlistee's eligibility, rather than to sell him an enlistment. Once the prospect's ability to measure up has been established, the interviewers lead the conversation into the above-average pay opportunities, thence into the 10-point sales talk." (23:1)

Equal job opportunities did not extend to everyone. Individuals enlisting for specialties in the Army Security Agency, for example, were required to be "... of the white race," (25:1) among other prerequisites. Correspondingly, recruiting efforts of the time had to consider race a factor in filling military occupational specialties. (17:2-3) This perception that non-whites were a possible security risk or somehow unable to handle the more mentally challenging technical aspects of a specialty soon dissolved; however, as late as 1955, 28% of adults polled disapproved of the policy of desegregation in the Armed Services. (10:15) However, only 13% of 16- to 20-year-old males polled disapproved, indicating an enormous shift in attitude between potential recruits who were only a few years apart in age. (11:16)

The 1955 poll was part of a continuing effort by the Department of Defense to identify the needs, attitudes, and perceptions of the target population, namely, young adult civilians and 16- to 20- year-old males. The survey of 16- to 20-year-old males made some interesting conclusions:

"While a career in the military service as an Officer is held in higher esteem as an occupation by teen-agers than by their elders, a career as an Enlisted Man carries little prestige with young men today...

"Young men today are overwhelmingly inclined to look upon their military service as an onerous obligation, and not one from which they can derive many advantages...

"The Air Force occupies the role of favorite branch of service in the minds of these teen-agers...

"The importance of an effective public relations program designed to foster, among those in the service, favorable attitudes toward the military service is indicated. The survey reveals that young men base their attitudes toward military service more on reports from people who are or have been in the service than on any other source of information." (11:Conclusions)

Clearly, the newly-created Air Force was off to a good start, image-wise, but the prestige of the enlisted man generally was something less than stellar. In fact, 25% of young males polled (and 28% of adults) thought that men who chose to make a career as an enlisted man did so because they were "either unable or unwilling to make a civilian living." (11:6) Almost two-thirds of those polled were heavily influenced in their opinions by someone who had been in the service. In other words, recruiters trying to focus on attracting quality enlistees by emphasizing training and educational benefits, travel, pay and prestige found themselves battling the image of the enlisted man as pictured in Beetle Bailey, Willie and Joe, and countless war movies of the period. A father's tales of boot camp, C-rations, and foxholes did little to encourage a son toward enlistment in a service which tried to portray itself as an attractive career option.

Important trends in recruiting possibilities for media were identified in the same survey. Among the target group of 16- to 20-year-old males, favorable impressions of servicemen were obtained from newspaper stories (16%), magazines (18%), television shows (39%), and movies (49%). The survey concluded that motion pictures "were an important mass communications medium in terms of influencing the male teen-agers of the country -- for good or bad." (11: 12) This conclusion was not lost on recruiters, who began focusing on the relatively new medium of television to get their message across. By 1971, 78% of potential recruits were reached through television. (19:4)

Conscription, begun with the Korean War and ending in 1973, motivated large numbers of young men to enlist in the Air Force who would otherwise have been drafted into the army. A 1971 survey found that 13% of those sampled would consider enlisting for active service during a draft, but only 11% would consider enlisting otherwise. (19:3) Education was found to be a very strong lure to the services, with the Air Force perceived as offering the best training. The survey also found that 24% of the 16-21 age group sampled considered a paid college education the single best endorsement to enlistment.

This consistent propensity to enlist for an education did not go unnoticed. The Personnel Research Division of Air Force Systems Command conducted a study in August 1970 which found that "33.7 percent (of active duty subjects interviewed) gave as a reason for enlistment the expectation of an opportunity to learn what they wanted to learn." It further found that enlistees who scored in AFQT Category I (the indicator of highest intelligence and the people most desired for enlistment) "gave educational opportunity as a reason for enlistment more often than did those in the lower percentile ranges (AFQT Category IV). The lower ability group gave travel opportunity and wide choice of assignments more often than did the upper ability group." (1:v)

The direction seemed clear. To attract the quality recruits, stress education vice travel and adventure. During the *Accent on Youth* working group meeting held at Sheppard AFB in April 1971, educational and training issues dominated the agenda. Among the topics suggested were changes to Operation Bootstrap to encourage reenlistment, formation of a tri-command committee to study the potential of education and training programs as incentives for recruitment and retention, and the creation of an accredited institution to maintain transcripts of technical training and off-duty education. (13:2) The latter suggestion culminated in the establishment of the Community College of the Air Force, which was considered "an attractive selling point for recruiters and retention counselors" at its inception. (22:-) Recruiters could now promise an accredited institution which would not only accept transcripts from a variety of colleges and technical schools, but would remain unaffected by the enlistee's reassignments throughout his career.

As the war in Vietnam drew to a close, American public opinion had swung against conscription and toward an all-volunteer force (AVF). Recruiters, once assured of a steady supply of men (about one out of two was a "reluctant volunteer" whose entry in the Air Force was "draft induced") now had to cull recruits from a population that was no longer "draft-motivated." (20:8)

At first, the AVF encountered no problems. Recruiters found it relatively easy to meet their quotas; after all, youth unemployment was high in 1973, the economy was in a shambles, and enlistees could earn about as much as their civilian counterparts. (12:8)

However, recruiting shortfalls began appearing in the late 1970s. Perhaps the greatest contributing factors to the decline in enlistments were the pay caps of 1975, 1978, and 1979. High school graduates who enlisted in 1979, for example, earned about 18.9% less than their peers who entered the civilian labor force. (12:8) This pay gap made it increasingly difficult for recruiters to sell the idea of military service on the basis of pay. Picking up on the education theme once again, recruiters had a new program to tout: the post-Vietnam Era Veterans' Educational Assistance Program (VEAP). VEAP was enacted in 1976, and it was partly designed to "provide the armed services with an educational incentive to promote recruitment into the All-Volunteer Force...." (9:1)

The pay gap, however, proved to be an increasingly serious impediment to recruiting quality enlistees. Finally, Congress temporarily solved the problem by "(severing) the link between adjustments to military and GS civilian pay, granting average military pay increases of 11.7 percent in FY 1981 and 14.3 percent in FY 1982 rather than the 9.1 percent and 4.8 percent increases granted to GS civilians." The President and Congress were finally convinced that "military pay had fallen below competitive levels and that large "catch-up" increases were needed to restore rough parity with private sector wage and salary changes that had occurred since the beginning of the AVF period." (18:IV-1-2)

With the pay problem somewhat abated (albeit temporarily), accession efforts could be focused on the attraction and retention of "quality" enlistees. The Department of Defense had learned a lesson in economics over the past three decades: recruiting and training enlistees who failed to

complete their terms of enlistment or who were unlikely to reenlist for a second term was an expensive alternative to attracting quality career people in the first place. One quality indicator was the possession of a high school diploma: about 20 percent of diploma-holders left service prematurely, compared with GED-holders at 33.8 percent and non-diploma-holders at 35.9 percent. (6:43) By October of 1987 recruiters were told to place recruits with "non-traditional" degrees into a category separate from high school diploma graduates - priority would be given to those with a high school diploma and those without diplomas who had completed a semester of college. (8:21) Cost savings from lower attrition rates were projected to be as much as \$22 million a year. The Air Force was ahead of the game here; for the first half of FY 1987, fully 99 percent of its recruits were high school graduates, while the DoD average was 91 percent. Correspondingly, reenlistments for the Air Force were up 7 percent over the previous year, while the rate for the other services declined. Enlistee quality as measured by standard aptitude tests was up throughout the DoD, however: 95 percent rated as average or above, while only 69 percent of the general youth population achieved the same score. (7:2) The connection between education and retention was firmly established, and recruitment of enlistees with at least a high school diploma became the rule.

How best to reach these potential recruits was sometimes a matter of debate. Television and radio were used extensively for advertising, yet a Rand Corporation study circa 1989 found that, while TV and radio ads reached a larger audience than printed ads, "the percentage of that audience qualified to serve in the military doesn't justify the higher costs associated with broadcast...." Higher quality recruits, in other words, were more apt to be enticed by print ads in magazines and newspapers than by TV and radio spots. Since print ads produced recruits at \$2,000 to \$3,400 per person (vice \$7,000 to \$10,000 per person for television), printed media would result in a significant cost savings. (21:6)

The Pentagon, however, disputed the findings with the rationale that "nobody has yet been able to isolate a community in the United States and advertise in that community strictly in newspapers." (21:6) As a result, recruiting efforts continue to be costly due to advertising



expenses, although advertising agencies view DoD accounts as "quite small" compared to many corporate accounts. The Army, for example, spent \$63 million on national television ads in FY 1986, compared with McDonalds' \$250 million, Coca-Cola's \$600 million, and Proctor & Gamble's \$872 million. (2:73) National advertising campaigns had the advantage of providing "umbrella coverage" of potential recruits, leaving the local recruiters to concentrate on ways to reinforce the image locally.

Recruitment of females and blacks began to receive increased attention, primarily because they were viewed as available sources of manpower in the post-draft era. The 1982 Military Manpower Task Force found that blacks have a higher propensity than whites to enlist and reenlist based on "... the fact that military service offers blacks better opportunities for responsible work at fair compensation than are available to them in many segments of the private sector." (18:13) Increasingly, black and female faces began appearing in television ads for military recruiting. Recognizing the need to enlarge the pool of potential volunteers, the DoD began emphasizing the improved opportunities for women in non-traditional jobs. The percentage of enlisted females in the Air Force correspondingly increased from 2.0 in 1972 to 11.3 in 1982 and to 11.5 in 1987. (18:17-18)

The focus on enlisted recruiting for the Air Force, then, has indeed changed with the times. Educational opportunities, while always viewed as important to the recruit, have received even more emphasis since the inception of the AVF. Females, virtually ignored as possible enlistees in the post-World War II era, have been seen as an important pool of potential recruits for the AVF and are targeted as such in advertising. Social changes such as the civil rights movement drove the change in the treatment of minorities; jobs once reserved for members of the white race are now open to members of every race, leaving recruiters to concentrate on putting the best recruit in the best job without regard to such non-behavioral characteristics as skin color. Technological advancements such as television have been effectively used for advertising. Studies and surveys are continuously used to identify perceptions, needs, and attitudes of youth in the general

population in order to design an effective approach to show how those needs can be fulfilled through enlisting. In short, the recruiting efforts of the Air Force have proven to be dynamic and effective in adapting to changing social and economic environments. Quality recruiting has produced quality results.

### ***Bibliography***

1. Air Force Systems Command. AFHRL-TR-70-29, *Why Airmen Enlist*. August 1970.
2. *Air Force Times*. *Life in the Times*. 21 July 1986.
3. Army Air Forces. *Think This Over.....* (recruiting pamphlet for the AAF). c. 1946.
4. Army Air Forces. *It's Smart to Stay In* (retention pamphlet for the AAF). September 1946.
5. Army Air Forces. *Recruiting Plans of the Army Air Force*. 1942.
6. Budhan, P.J. *Air Force Times*. *Definition of High School Graduate Being Tightened for New Recruits*. 20 April 1987.
7. Budhan, P.J. *Navy Times*. *Quality of Recruits Continues at Near-Record Rates*. 15 June 1987.
8. Burlage, John. *Air Force Times*. *DoD Stiffens Recruits' Diploma Requirements*. 2 November, 1987.
9. Congress, Senate. *Hearing Before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, United States Senate, Ninety-Sixth Congress, Second Session, on S.2020, S.2596 and Related Bills, June 19, 1980*. U.S. Government Printing Office. Washington: 1980.
10. Department of Defense, Office of Armed Forces Information and Education, *Attitudes of Adult Civilians Toward the Military Service as a Career - Part I of a Study*. 1955.
11. Department of Defense, Office of Armed Forces Information and Education, *Attitudes of 16 to 20 Year Old Males Toward the Military Service as a Career - Part II of a Study*. 1955.
12. Fullinwider, Robert K. *Conscripts and Volunteers*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983.
13. Headquarters, Air Training Command. *Accent on Youth Working Group Meeting: Conclusions and Recommendations*. April 1971.
14. Headquarters, Army Air Forces. AAF Letter 35-33, *AAF Recruiting Policies*. 12 July 1946.
15. Headquarters, Army Air Forces. AAF Letter 35-33, *AAF Recruiting Policies*. 18 July 1947.
16. Headquarters, Army Air Forces. AAF Letter 35-50, *AAF Selective Recruiting Program*. 20 June 1947.

17. Headquarters, Army Air Forces. AAF Letter 35-130, *Enlistments and Reenlistments in the Regular Army*. 21 June 1946.
18. Military Manpower Task Force. *A Report to the President on the Status and Prospects of the All-Volunteer Force (Revised)*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 1982.
19. Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower and Reserve Affairs). *Attitudes of Youth Toward Military Service - Results of a National Survey Conducted in May 1971*. October 1971.
20. Office of Special Studies, HQ, USAF. *An Analysis of the Quality of Air Force Accessions on a Geographic Basis. Volume I -- Overview*. May 1974.
21. Schill, Charlie. *Navy Times*. *Pentagon not sold on its recruiting ads study*. 26 June 1989.
22. Simler, G. B., Lt. Gen., USAF. Letter to General John D. Ryan, Chief of Staff, USAF. 19 April 1971.
23. U.S. Army Recruiting Service Letter. Vol. III, No. 23. *Sixth Army Inaugurates New Prestige Campaign*. 10 August 1947.
24. War Department. Circular No. 48, *Section II: Enlistments and Reenlistments in Regular Army*. 21 February 1947.
25. War Department. Memorandum No. 600-750-11. *Enlistments in the Army Security Agency*. 6 March 1947.