

# Recruiting & Retaining Air Force Talent: The Key to Tomorrow's Air Force

A Monograph

by

Colonel Antonio Alvarado  
US Air Force



School of Advanced Military Studies  
US Army Command and General Staff College  
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Name of Candidate: Col Antonio Alvarado

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Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Monograph Director  
Dan C. Fullerton, PhD

\_\_\_\_\_, ASLSP Director  
Barry M. Stentiford, PhD,

\_\_\_\_\_, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies  
Kirk C. Dorr, COL

Accepted this 23rd day of May 2019 by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Director, Graduate Degree Programs  
Robert F. Baumann, PhD

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## Abstract

Recruiting & Retaining Air Force Talent: The Key to Tomorrow's Air Force by Col Antonio Alvarado, US Air Force, 78 pages

Eighteen years of constant conflict have pushed each of the US service branches to the brink of exhaustion. For the Air Force to “Fly, Fight and Win” in the future requires recruiting the next generation of airmen while retaining those already in the Air Force. Unfortunately, factors both external and internal to the Air Force have become threats to recruiting and retention, forcing reconsideration of processes, policies and philosophies that have worked for years. Outside of Air Force control is the fact few of America's youth are physically able to meet military entrance standards, and of those eligible, fewer are interested in military service for numerous reasons. This leaves all US service branches to compete for the same small talent pool. Additionally, the effects of the Department of Defense 2014 manning drawdown are still being felt, which to the Air Force resulted in a loss of approximately 20,000 airmen. Pay and benefits are also areas that are considered factors in the decision to join or stay. Internal Air Force factors are primarily due to balancing the unwavering ops tempo while overcoming drawdown effects. Quality of life issues for airmen and their families continue to hamper Air Force retention, leaving senior Air Force leadership struggling to maintain mission readiness. In the end, continued changes to recruiting, personnel management, retention efforts, and leadership methods must be refined to ensure the sustained talent pool needed to meet the challenges posed by ever-developing and technologically-advanced adversaries seeking to contest America's national security.

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## Acronyms

|        |                                               |
|--------|-----------------------------------------------|
| ACSC   | Air Command and Staff College                 |
| AETC   | Air Education and Training Command            |
| ADHD   | Attention deficit/hyperactive disorder        |
| AFB    | Air Force Base                                |
| AFCENT | Air Force Central Command                     |
| AFSC   | Air Force Specialty Code                      |
| AFI    | Air Force Instruction                         |
| AWC    | Air War College                               |
| BRS    | Blended retirement system                     |
| CBT    | Computer-based training                       |
| CDC    | Childcare Development Center                  |
| CMSAF  | Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force        |
| CJSC   | Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff         |
| CSAF   | Chief of Staff of the Air Force               |
| C2     | Command and control                           |
| CCAF   | Community College of the Air Force            |
| CPIP   | Cultural process improvement plan             |
| DoD    | Department of Defense                         |
| DE     | Developmental education                       |
| DL     | Distance learning                             |
| DADT   | “Don’t ask, don’t tell”                       |
| FY     | Fiscal Year                                   |
| ISR    | Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance |

LGBTQ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning

MSgt Master Sergeant

MRFF Military Religious Freedom Foundation

MDC2 Multi-domain command and control

NCO Noncommissioned officer

OPS TEMPO Operations tempo

PCS Permanent Change of Station

PME Professional military education

RPA Remotely piloted aircraft

SECAF Secretary of the Air Force

SECDEF Secretary of Defense

SMSgt Senior Master Sergeant

SNCOs Senior noncommissioned officers

TSgt Technical Sergeant

TSP Thrift Savings Plan

VRRAD Voluntary Retired Return to Active Duty

## Introduction

First, future conflict will be transregional. Our adversaries are not paying attention to our combatant commander maps. Conflicts are, and will be, multi-domain, including air, land, sea, space and cyberspace and the undersea domain. The Air Force must be masters across the spectrum.

—General David Goldfein, CSAF, Air Force Association Breakfast

For the past seventeen years, the United States has been engaged in the ongoing “war on terror.” The monetary cost for the constant military involvement in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria is approaching \$6 trillion dollars, and could reach \$7 trillion if continued into the early 2020s.<sup>1</sup> From a man-hour perspective however, the time spent preparing to deploy, deployed, then reconstituting is incalculable. In spite of the time invested in these regions, former Defense Secretary James Mattis and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) General Joseph Dunford have stated, “this should not be seen as a permanent U.S. presence there.”<sup>2</sup> Regardless of the technical definition of permanent, the relentless operations tempo (OPS TEMPO) as a result of these operations has taken its toll on each service branch. With no relief in sight, the readiness narratives for all service branches have become eerily similar: not enough resources, manning, and/or time to execute at the current pace without compromising future readiness. This leaves each branch to determine how to prepare themselves for the future. For the Air Force, this means it is increasingly difficult to execute current missions, much less new future missions.

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Shane, “Price tag of the ‘war on terror’ will top \$6 trillion soon,” *Military Times*, Nov 14, 2018, accessed December 21, 2018, [https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2018/11/14/price-tag-of-the-war-on-terror-will-top-6-trillion-soon/?utm\\_source=Sailthru&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=ebb%2015.11.18&utm\\_term=Editorial%20-%20Early%20Bird%20Brief](https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2018/11/14/price-tag-of-the-war-on-terror-will-top-6-trillion-soon/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ebb%2015.11.18&utm_term=Editorial%20-%20Early%20Bird%20Brief).

<sup>2</sup> Tara Copp, “DoD: Afghanistan operations could hit 22 years — but don’t call it a permanent presence: Is the U.S. presence in Afghanistan permanent?” *Military Times*, August 28, 2018, accessed August 21, 2018, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/08/28/dod-afghanistan-operations-could-hit-22-years-but-dont-call-it-a-permanent-presence/>.

In May 2017, Lieutenant General Gina Grosso, the Air Force manpower personnel and services deputy chief of staff, testified before the Armed Services Subcommittee on Military personnel regarding the state of the Air Force. She stated the Air Force enterprise “faces three distinct challenges: the need for increased manpower to support current mission requirements, a national pilot crisis, and the quality of life and quality of service needs of Airmen and their families.”<sup>3</sup> Her statement, in few words, profoundly described the Air Force’s most challenging problem set to date: the need to understand and resolve the factors that influence someone’s decision to join the Air Force or even more serious in the near term, understanding how to get airmen to stay in the Air Force. Understanding these factors, which are not all militarily driven, will enable a review of practices and policies that will inform reconsideration of both current recruiting strategies that provide our next generation of enlisted and officer airmen as well as improves our ability to retain the airmen we do have, which are life blood for today’s fight. This paper will explore the many factors that impact the Air Force in these endeavors, looking from both an external and internal perspectives. While impossible to explore every possible factor potentially impactful to the decision to join or stay in the Air Force, the aim of this paper is to explore the most commonly documented factors that influence future and current airmen alike. Before factors can be investigated, however, it is imperative to have a broad understanding of the Air Force.

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<sup>3</sup> “AF to Congress: Readiness depends on strong, resilient force,” US Air Force, May 18, 2017, accessed September 20, 2018, <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1186852/af-to-congress-readiness-depends-on-strong-resilient-force/>.

## Air Force Overview

### Air Force Mission and Core Missions, Current and Future

Simply stated, the Air Force mission is to “fly, fight, and win in air, space and cyberspace.”<sup>4</sup> To enable operations in these three domains, the Air Force has developed five core missions, which are executed world-wide on a daily basis. The Air Force core missions are: air and space superiority, global strike, rapid global mobility, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), and command and control (C2).<sup>5</sup> Alternately stated, these core missions are how the Air Force supports currently national security, which naturally requires planning for development of future missions. The *2015 Air Force Future Operating Concept*, published by Headquarters Air Force in Washington DC, does attempt to forecast Air Force core missions for 2035. The revised missions are anticipated as multi-domain command and control (MDC2), adaptive domain control, globally integrated ISR, rapid global mobility, and global precision strike.<sup>6</sup> While specifics on how these missions will be executed has yet to be determined and will certainly evolve over time, the current Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF), General David L. Goldfein has already begun instituting changes to the Air Force in preparation for the future.

### CSAF Focus Areas

After becoming CSAF in 2016, Gen. Goldfein identified three focus areas to begin Air Force modernization. His first focus area was revitalizing squadrons, which he considers the basic building block of operations and where airmen and their families thrive. The second focus

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<sup>4</sup> “Missions,” US Air Force, accessed January 3, 2019, <https://www.airforce.com/mission>.

<sup>5</sup> David Goldfein and Heather Wilson, “USAF Posture Statement Fiscal Year 2019,” Department of the Air Force presentation to the Committees of the United States Senate and the House of Representatives 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 115<sup>th</sup> Congress, March 14, 2018, accessed January 3, 2019, [https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/1/FY19\\_AF\\_POSTURE\\_STATEMENT\\_HIGH\\_RES.PDF](https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/1/FY19_AF_POSTURE_STATEMENT_HIGH_RES.PDF).

<sup>6</sup> Headquarters US Air Force, *Air Force Future Operating Concept - A View of the Air Force in 2035* (Washington, DC: Headquarters US Air Force, September 2015), 14-34.

area was strengthening joint leaders and teams, which entails increasing the Air Force's preparedness for executing and current and future joint operations. A central aspect to this focus area is the deliberate professional development of both officer and enlisted airmen. Gen. Goldfein's final focus area was advancing MDC2 operations. He states the Air Force can be the "connective tissue for the joint force," as the military transitions into the information age of warfare, which inherently translates to MDC2, which most simply explained features networked systems to enable rapid decision making.<sup>7</sup> Completion of these three focus areas not only bolsters the ability to execute today's missions, it prepares the strategic landscape for future missions, such as advanced space operations. Air Force Space Command has made it clear the US must invest in space operations based on the increasing criticality to military missions. "It is also well known our enemies are always looking for ways to counter our capabilities," according to Gen. John Hyten, former commander of Air Force Space Command.<sup>8</sup> The need to prepare for the future became more apparent when in February 2019, it was announced the Air Force would be responsible for the planning and development of the Space Force directed by President Trump.<sup>9</sup> While Gen. Goldfein's focus areas prepare the Air Force for the quickly approaching future, the challenge is getting ready for it while still being immersed in today's fight.

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<sup>7</sup> "Commander's Call Topics," United States Air Force, accessed December 19, 2018, [https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/cct/2016/CCT\\_22\\_SEPT\\_2016.pdf?ver=2016-09-22-140448-997](https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/cct/2016/CCT_22_SEPT_2016.pdf?ver=2016-09-22-140448-997).

<sup>8</sup> Phillip Swarts, "Space increasingly important to military operations," *Air Force Times*, September 21, 2015, accessed December 11, 2018, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.lumen.cgscarl.com/resources/doc/nb/news/158499FE920576E0?p=AFNB>.

<sup>9</sup> Marcus Weisgerber, "The US Air Force has Won Control of the Space Force," *Defense One*, February 12, 2019, accessed February 14, 2019, <https://www.defenseone.com/politics/2019/02/air-force-has-won-control-space-force/154834/>.

## Current Operations Impact on Air Force Readiness

Like all US military services, constant Air Force operations are creating strain at the squadron, group, wing or at senior leadership levels, making managing mission fatigue among the greatest problems in today's Air Force. In 2018, the defense manpower data center reported that for Air Force active duty members only, there was a permanent presence in 119 countries which requires 53,256 airmen to fulfill.<sup>10</sup> This condition was illustrated to the Secretary of the Air Force (SECAF) Heather Wilson in November 2017, when she met and spoke to an airman returning from his seventeenth deployment. Alarmed, she relayed to the CJSC, "We're burning out our people." Similar to other branches, the Air Force often supports deployment requirements that are not specifically Air Force positions. For instance, because of unique skill sets, airmen are often assigned to Army, Navy or Marine Corps units. When accounting for time spent preparing for deployment, deploying, then training refreshing requirements when back in garrison, all the while trying to balance families, the available time to an airman, known as "whitespace" and will be explained in greater detail later, becomes extremely limited. This little time regretfully results in compromising the ability to prepare for the "high end fight," which is described as future complex wars against adversaries who are constantly advancing their capabilities to negate US capabilities.<sup>11</sup>

As if constant deployments were already not difficult, an added frustration is the lack of predictability faced by airmen and their organizations. In this case, career field managers are

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<sup>10</sup> "Military and civilian personnel by service/agency by state/country (Updated Quarterly)," Defense Manpower Data Center under the Office of Secretary of Defense. 2018, [https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dwp\\_reports.jsp](https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dwp_reports.jsp).

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Losey, "Air Force takes a hard look at who's deploying and why - leaders anxious to rebalance the force to prepare for high-end fight," *Air Force Times*, April 2, 2018, accessed December 14, 2018, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/resources/doc/nb/news/16AEDE704FAED0F8?p=NewsBank>.

often unable to predict airmen deployments, as taskings are levied from higher organizational echelons, often from names in a database.<sup>12</sup> This means airmen can be taken from their units without squadron, group, or wing leadership ability to assess or adjust timing, locations, or deployed duties, directly impacts the readiness of their respective organizations. It has been frequently seen that an airman is taken for a deployment that does not have the right skill set, has family issues that would hamper deployment effectiveness, or in other cases, when other airmen would be willing and able to deploy instead and are not allowed based on the higher echelon organization selection. All of this lack of flexibility translates to lost mission readiness at the unit level. Although difficult for any unit to bear, the operational impact becomes more acute when this occurs in critically manned where the decision to separate from the Air Force via the “seven-day option.”<sup>13</sup> While there is much that senior Air Force leadership can and is doing to increase the effectiveness of recruiting and retention efforts, there are some factors simply beyond their control which can at best only be mitigated through Air Force policy legislation.

### External Factors Impacting the Military

From decisions made by senior civil leadership to changes in society, senior Air Force leadership faces many challenges when trying to posture the Air Force for current and future success. This section will explore several of the major conditions that are aimed and only analogous to the Air Force, but nonetheless are factors to recruiting and retaining the airmen needed for continued mission success. The unfortunate aspect of these and many of the factors in this paper is the effects of each of these conditions are often unquantifiable but known to be

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<sup>12</sup> John A. Ausink et al., *Managing Air Force Joint Expeditionary Taskings in an Uncertain Environment* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2011), 51.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 39.

influential regardless. A critical understanding that must be achieved is of the airmen that are considering joining the Air Force and those already in.

## Societal Generations in the Military

The US military, to include the Air Force, is comprised of four societal generations, each with distinct characteristics. Current senior Air Force leadership comes from either the “Baby Boomer” or “Generation X” generations, Baby Boomers being born between 1943 to 1960.<sup>14</sup> They are characterized as hard working and had the term “workaholic” coined for them based on quality.<sup>15</sup> There are few “Baby Boomers” remaining in the Air Force; however those remaining are in key senior leadership positions. They are closely followed by Gen Xers, born between 1960 to 1980, which represents more of the current senior leadership and a majority of the upper middle management in the Air Force.<sup>16</sup> While a much smaller population than Baby Boomers from a numerical perspective, they have witnessed “high prices for success,” to include high divorce rates as well as substance abuse, stress and health problems within their own families. Therefore, Gen Xers generally seek balance in their professional and personal lives.<sup>17</sup>

Millennials, born between 1980 through 2000, constitute a preponderance of the airmen in lower middle management that are prime retention targets or serve as leads for recruiting.<sup>18</sup> For context, millennials are thirty-five percent of the labor force, making them the

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<sup>14</sup> “Generation X” members are known as “Gen Xers” and will be referred to as such in this paper. Bridget Hamacher, *Different Generations and the culture of Leadership—Does it Matter?* (Master of Military Studies Research Paper, USMC Command and Staff College, September 2009-April 2010), 4.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>18</sup> Hamacher, *Different Generations*, 8.

most numerically superior generation in the U.S. labor force and military.<sup>19</sup> Due to their technological savvy, coupled with high confidence from their Baby Boomer and Gen Xer parents, they are often confident and comfortable in today's "connected world."<sup>20</sup> This has contributed to their greater multiculturalism appreciation, which equates to ready acceptance of different religions, races and backgrounds.<sup>21</sup> Millennials tend to be the faces seen by the current generation of recruits, who are either "post-millennials" or from "Generation Z." Born after 2000, this generation is still being evaluated, however, from a military perspective, notably having little emotional attachment to the constant conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, creating questions on their motivation to join the military.<sup>22</sup>

The conclusion for understanding generational differences is that world views will vary, as will values as coworkers and subordinates. Regardless of the generational differences, the end result must still be a military and Air Force founded on mutual understanding. As stated by Bridget Hamacher, an author on societal generations, "different generations communicate, work, and think differently."<sup>23</sup> Fusing converging belief systems amongst any set of individuals is already difficult, but, stoking post post-millennial interest to join is becoming increasingly difficult.

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Fry, "Millennials are the largest generation in the U.S. labor force," Pew Research Center, April 11, 2018, accessed Jan 16, 2019, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/04/11/millennials-largest-generation-us-labor-force/>.

<sup>20</sup> Hamacher, *Different Generations*, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>22</sup> "Military must adapt to avoid a recruiting crisis - From the editors," *Air Force Times*, November 18, 2018, accessed December 12, 2018, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/resources/doc/nb/news/16FCAD43B9F8ED58?p=AFNB>.

<sup>23</sup> Hamacher, *Different Generations*, 4.

## Interest to Join the US Military

### Declining Military Appeal

Shockingly, nearly seventy percent of 17-24-year olds are ineligible for service for reasons ranging from body weight, past drug abuse, medical issues, tattoos, and/or criminal records.<sup>24</sup> Of the few remaining candidates, a reluctance to join has been noted by recruiters for numerous reasons, while many reasons remain unknown. One detrimental factor in military and Air Force accessions is a growing divide between the military and civilians. The Department of Defense (DoD) determined that currently, eighty percent of military recruits come from families who have also served. Research from Booz Allen Hamilton and Blue Star Families, a non-profit organization serving the military community, determined that in the 1990's, eighty percent of military families recommended the military to their children. As of 2017, the number of recommendations was reduced to forty percent, which seems to indicate some level of growing disinterest or dissatisfaction.

### Hollywood's Take on Military Life does not Help

As leadership and recruiters continue to determine what factors inspire young people to join the Air Force and/or provides the motivation to keep current members in its ranks, it is important to understand how the American populace views the military community, which is currently not overwhelmingly positive. Although no one can credibly assert malice on the part of Hollywood when depicting military life, it is clear that its frequent inaccurate depictions of

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<sup>24</sup> Gina Harkins, "How the Military Recruits when 70% of Americans Can't Serve," Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), February 5, 2018, accessed December 16, 2018, <http://www.moaa.org/Content/Publications-and-Media/News-Articles/2018-News-Articles/How-the-Military-Recruits-when-70--of-Americans-Can-t-Serve.aspx>.

military life in media and entertainment have been detrimental.<sup>25</sup> Generally speaking, military life representations often fall into one of two stereotypes, “larger than life individuals” or “veterans that are broken and can’t adjust to society.”<sup>26</sup> The harmful by-product of these life illustrations translates to a diminished interest for young people who are otherwise inclined to join, although unquantifiable to what extent. This, in combination with the reduced family advocacy to join the military, places the burden of serving on fewer people, which ultimately undermines long-term growth of the military service.<sup>27</sup> Interest to join is definitely problematic, and is an increasing concern for Pentagon leadership, a significant data point being the Army falling short of its recruiting goals by 6,500.<sup>28</sup> But is easier than some of the other challenges seen in current recruiting efforts.

## Physical Inability to Join

A growing threat limiting the number of future recruits is the inability to meet military entrance physical fitness standards, which naturally translates to career fields or specialties that are not replenished. The limited pool is not just an Air Force problem, however. According to the former Commanding General of the Army Recruiting Command, “The obesity issue is the most troubling because the trend is going in the wrong direction.” From an Army perspective, it was estimated that only two of ten would be qualified to join the Army. Much of this is attributed to America’s “culture of obesity,” where infrequent exercise and poor nutritional choices are

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<sup>25</sup> Emma Moore, “How the Media’s Narrow Portrayal of Service Members Does the Military A Disservice,” *Task and Purpose*, August 2, 2018, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://taskandpurpose.com/media-portrayal-service-members-veterans>.

<sup>26</sup> Charlsy Panzino, “‘Warrior caste’: Is a public disconnect hurting military recruiting efforts?” *Military Times*, January 18, 2018, accessed December 18, 2018, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-army/2018/01/19/warrior-caste-is-a-public-disconnect-hurting-military-recruiting-efforts/>.

<sup>27</sup> Moore, “Media’s Narrow Portrayal of Service Members.”

<sup>28</sup> “Military must adapt,” *Air Force Times*.

affecting those who enlist. More alarming, the Army has spent approximately \$1.5B in health care of overweight soldiers, or in replacing them when discharged. While the Air Force has not released comparable obesity data as presented here, obesity is clearly a growing concern from all services.

In response to this looming crisis, numerous retired admirals and generals have formed the nonprofit “Mission: Readiness,” organization with the goal of pushing Congress to make school lunches healthier, to aid in increasing the number of eligible applicants. Representative Don Bacon, a former Air Force brigadier general and now member of the House subcommittee on military personnel, stated the lack of young people eligible for service constitutes a “red flag” with the potential to pose a threat to national security if the nation was forced into sustained major combat operations.

## Compensation Incentives

The answer to the question of “how many people join the military for the money or retirement” has yet to be determined nor is likely to ever be solved. The reality is that compensation is and always will be a factor to some degree. While Baby Boomers and Gen Xers may have been less financially motivated to join the military, post-millennials, with unimpeded access to information that shapes their decisions, may see military financial rewards differently. As it becomes easier with information access to draw civilian and military financial comparisons, especially in current times with a flourishing and vibrant economy, the military must ask if enough is being done from a pay and retirement benefits perspective to entice and/or retain America’s military manpower.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Harkins, “How the Military Recruits when 70% of Americans Can’t Serve.”

## Does it Pay Enough to Serve?

In the past, potential military members were reluctant to consider the military an employer and were uncomfortable discussing pay and benefits as it seemed to contradict the idealistic reasons for joining, which include: selflessness, service and sacrifice. Equally uncomfortable and difficult to quantify for the government was putting a price on service and sacrifice. The desire to reward military members handsomely has always been checked by the competing reality that funds are also required to ensure the availability of resources for military members to accomplish training, equipment, and readiness.<sup>30</sup> There is evidence to suggest that changes to pay scales and long-term benefits are not enough and remain a “must consider.”<sup>31</sup>

In 2016, RAND conducted a study to determine if changes made to military pay scales in fiscal year (FY) 2015 were effective in retaining senior enlisted and officer leadership. The 2015 military pay scale changes added pay increases for up to forty years of service from the previously limited pay increases that stopped at thirty years of service. The rationale for this was to keep as much of the executive leadership experience as possible through financial rewards to maintain some level of parity with civilian sector senior leaders.<sup>32</sup> The target ranks were flag officers and E-9s, who are often at the pinnacle of leadership and experience.<sup>33</sup> In the end, interviews conducted during the study revealed that while appreciated, the pay scale adjustments were only slightly effective. Those surveyed indicated anyone opting to stay were intrinsically motivated, not influenced by monetary reasons.<sup>34</sup> In this case, adjustments to

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<sup>30</sup> Lindsay Cohn, “How Much Is Enough?” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (2015): 57.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>32</sup> Beth J. Asch et al., *Retention, Incentives, and DoD Experience Under the 40-Year Military Pay Table* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2011), 9.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

military pay scales were intended to target members who had spent decades in the military, not those considering a career. Although this experience was specifically targeted, from a larger DoD scale, it is recognized that the military is unable to adjust financial benefits to match civilian organizations benefits in specialty career fields.<sup>35</sup>

There has been surprising evidence that supports the claim that if an eighteen-year-old graduated in high school in 2000 and then enlisted, he or she could have accrued more wealth than their civilian counterparts as a result of military pay wage growth increases by seventy-six percent in eighteen years. This eclipsed civilian pay, which registered only a sixty-three percent increase during the same period. This comparison becomes moot when comparing specialty occupations, however. As an example, the Air Force will pay an engineer \$150,000 per year to stay, while that the same job would be paid \$200,000 to \$300,000 in the civilian sector.<sup>36</sup> The larger concern besides losing special niche experience is not having enough resources to care for the larger community of future and current young recruits adequately.

In simple terms, current military pay charts are at times insufficient to sustain families of young enlisted members. In 2013, a Census Bureau study discovered that 23,000 active duty members from all services relied on food stamps to support their families.”<sup>37</sup> Once this was recognized, a group of senators pursued legislative efforts that granted military servicemembers and their families access to food assistance programs that they were previously denied as a

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<sup>35</sup> Cohn, “How Much?,” 55.

<sup>36</sup> Andrew Tilghman, “Military versus civilian: Which pays better?” *Air Force Times*, January 15, 2018, accessed January 27, 2019, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/169578BEEBB506A0?p=AFNB>.

<sup>37</sup> Claudia Grisales, “Lawmakers push for military access to food assistance program,” *Stars & Stripes*, March 2, 2018, accessed January 3, 2019, <https://www.stripes.com/news/lawmakers-push-for-military-access-to-food-assistance-program-1.514735>.

result of a discrepancy between eligibility and military benefits.<sup>38</sup> This same bureau also discovered one in four students in DoD schools were eligible for free meals.<sup>39</sup> For now, the DoD knows there are families in need, but has not determined the exact amount.

In summary, military pay may not be the most lucrative especially when compared to the civilian market but is in most cases enough to support most military families, albeit not extravagantly. Another financial aspect to when considering a career is the long-term benefits that are gained when committing to a twenty-plus year career. Recent changes have caused reconsideration for those once attracted to the military retirement.

### Is the Retirement Worth It?

Up front, it should be understood only seventeen percent of servicemembers in all branches serve at least a twenty-year career; therefore, this discussion affects a small demographic but plays a role in a decision to commit to a full military career. This factor was changed in 2015 when the retirement plan was given its most significant update since World War II. The change allowed some members to remain with the traditional retirement plan, or “opt in” to the new plan. In a third scenario, others were not given an option based on when they joined but were automatically enrolled into the new plan known as the “blended retirement system (BRS).<sup>40</sup> This is being met with mixed emotions and creating questions for some on the desirability to make the military and (and Air Force) a career. Currently, there are

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Dorian Merina, “How Many Military Families Need Food Assistance? The Pentagon Doesn't Know,” The American Homefront Project, April 18, 2017, accessed January 15, 2019, <http://americanhomefront.wunc.org/post/how-many-military-families-need-food-assistance-pentagon-doesnt-know>.

<sup>40</sup> Karen Jowers, “Not many troops are opting into the new retirement system,” *Military Times*, October 22, 2018, accessed January 17, 2019, <https://www.militarytimes.com/pay-benefits/2018/10/22/not-many-troops-are-opting-into-the-new-retirement-system/>.

500,000 members, approximately thirty-three percent of all servicemembers, in the BRS. Of them, 150,000 members were automatically enrolled based on their time of enlistment.<sup>41</sup> When trying to anticipate the attractiveness of the BRS to new members who are considering careers, it is requisite to understand the differences from the legacy retirement plan to BRS.

The most striking change between the legacy and BRS plans is that those under BRS will only receive forty percent of their base pay at twenty years of service vice the traditional plan that provides fifty percent of their base pay at the same twenty-year mark. In BRS, each additional year after twenty years of service provides an additional two percent retirement pay increase, unlike the traditional retirement plan that offers 2.5 percent. For both plans, participation in the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) is an option; however, in the BRS, there is a government matching option after reaching two years of service. The legacy plan offers no government matching option. Finally, in both plans, retirement pay begins the month after retirement, while members enrolled in the BRS do have an option not afforded to legacy retirement plan members. They are allowed to take larger “up-front” retirement payments in exchange for lower future retirement payments.<sup>42</sup>

Given these changes, the ultimate question becomes, “is the retirement worth serving a full career?” Positively, the BRS allows members to leave prior to fulfilling twenty years of service with start on a retirement plan that can be transferred to the civilian sector. Therefore, flexibility is an attractive aspect of the BRS. For members who stay at least twenty years, the BRS

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<sup>41</sup> Caitlin M. Kenney, “More than 500,000 servicemembers now enrolled in new Blended Retirement System,” *Stars & Stripes*, January 14, 2019, accessed January 17, 2019, <https://www.stripes.com/news/more-than-500-000-servicemembers-now-enrolled-in-new-blended-retirement-system-1.564417>.

<sup>42</sup> Ryan Guina, “New Military Retirement Plan – Military Bloggers Discuss the Pros and Cons,” *The Military Wallet*, last modified November 27, 2018, accessed January 17, 2019, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/04/18/us/75th-anniversary-doolittle-raid/index.html>.

is not as rewarding, even if members also choose to participate in TSP.<sup>43</sup> Based on the newness of the BRS, it is still too soon to determine its attractiveness but it is clear it is not as financially lucrative as the legacy retirement plan. While important in deciding to join the military or Air Force “for the long haul,” other considerations are proving vital to these decisions.

### Perceptions of US Military Diversity Acceptance

Based on the previous discussion of societal generation characteristics, it is clear that there is some value in joining organizations that embrace diversity and offers opportunities not possible in the civilian sector. In response to that, all services are making great strides to foster a progressive culture for new talent but there is still tremendous room for improvement in both the military and the Air Force. The reality is while the military stands against actions that result in inequality, the “the military is and should remain a microcosm of the larger American society,” which means undesirable societal characteristics and actions exist within the military despite best efforts to curb that behavior.<sup>44</sup>

In a scientific *Military Times* poll where 1,131 active duty members from all services were surveyed on a range of topics, responses regarding perceptions of racism in the military were staggering. While these poll results should not be considered absolutely definitive, they do reflect the ongoing struggle with racism in the military as twenty-four percent of those polled identified as nonwhite minorities. The survey indicated that one in four of the polled members had seen examples of racism among fellow servicemembers. More disconcerting was that forty-two percent of the respondents indicated having personally experienced some form of white nationalism while serving, sharing their view of white nationalism being a larger threat to

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Stephen J. Gerras and Leonard Wong, “Protecting, Not Just Reflecting, Society,” *Military Review* (May 2010), accessed 19 January 19, 2019, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/Online-Exclusive/2018-OLE/Apr/Protecting/>.

national security than Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq.<sup>45</sup> Although clear Air Force member views were shared as part of the results of this poll, three Air Force specific examples will be offered later in this paper. Regrettably, racial discrimination is just one of the many forms of discrimination found in the military today.

## LGBTQ Integration into the Military

It is well documented that homosexuality has existed within militaries world-wide, likely as long as militaries have existed. Sadly, many have felt the need to conceal identifies for fear of physical harm, verbal abuse, or career reprisals founded on the errant logic gay members were “sinful, psychologically defective, and even criminal.” It was also often asserted heterosexual members would not feel comfortable serving alongside a gay member, and gay integration into the military would erode unit cohesion.<sup>46</sup> Ultimately, there is little data to support this assertion and is akin to fears that drove racial segregation policies in the US military years ago.<sup>47</sup>

Early efforts to protect gay members serving in the military were simply unsuccessful. The 1990’s policy of “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” (DADT) was intended to allow gay members to serve without answering questions about their personal lifestyles, provided their lifestyles were not obvious to others. Once a lifestyle was discovered, the military at large was able to remove the members, and the loss of talent is unfathomable. Between 1994-2003, 9,488 members were separated from the services. Other sources indicate that between 2004 through 2009, 3,664 members were granted honorable discharges, with forty percent in “critical occupation” jobs. In

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<sup>45</sup> Leo Shane III, “A survey of active-duty troops,” *Air Force Times*, October 30, 2017, accessed January 19, 2019, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/1689EF950A7D93D0?p=NewsBank>.

<sup>46</sup> Christopher Marcus Alt, “The experiences of gay, military men and the impact on one's sense of masculinity” (Doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa, Fall 2015), accessed February 20, 2019, 40, <https://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/1948/>.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

monetary terms, the separations costed \$193 million, which accounts for discharging and replacing those members at the cost of an additional \$185 million to recruit and train replacements.<sup>48</sup> Because the policy called for rapid removal of servicemembers suspected as homosexuals, it was discovered that some, both gay and heterosexual, used the policy as an escape route from continued military service.<sup>49</sup> After heated discussion at the highest military and political leadership levels, President Barack Obama signed legislation to end DADT on December 22, 2010, which took effect on September 20, 2011.<sup>50</sup> The repeal of DADT was considered to “open the door for a more integrated environment,” allowing members to serve without the need to hide their identities. While this has not solved all problems faced by homosexuals in the military, research indicates the likelihood of increased acceptance in the future especially given the increased tolerance and understanding of different lifestyles from younger generation servicemembers.<sup>51</sup>

### Quality of life for Families

The quality of life for servicemember families has long been understood as a “make or break” factor for continuing service. Although there are many demands at work for servicemembers that can be mitigated and/or “worked through,” and unhappy family is often unresolvable. The two most reported conditions affecting families are the hardships associated with permanent changes of station (PCS) and the effects of near constant servicemember deployments on families.

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<sup>48</sup> Alt, “The experiences of gay, military men and the impact on one's sense of masculinity.”

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 124.

## Permanent changes of station

In 2018, the RAND Corporation completed a study on all branches that reviewed impacts to families during a (PCS). This study determined that regardless of the service, there were several universal complications that resulted in the overarching theme that “moving is disruptive,” and the impacts on the military member, spouse, and children, were often construed as negative. This was categorized largely as an adverse effect on “family stability.” RAND defined this as “a family’s ability to operate as a cohesive unit with consistent activities and routines, in both positive and negative ways.”<sup>52</sup> Ultimately, this study determined PCS moves affect desirability to remain in the military, “directly based on servicemember satisfaction with the military, and indirectly, as a result of spouse stressors and satisfaction with military life.”<sup>53</sup> A deeper look into the impacts on the spouses and children provides more insight into what other factors influences a servicemember’s satisfaction with the military.

From a spousal perspective, there are numerous stressors which contribute to military dissatisfaction which ultimately contribute to the willingness to remain in the military.<sup>54</sup> The spousal stressors often include complications from changing locations, bearing non-reimbursable financial costs in the course of a move, resolving whether to sell or rent the last residence, finding a residence in the new location, and then finally reestablishing the new residence as quickly as possible to minimize family disruption.<sup>55</sup> Another significant stressor is limitations on spousal employment, which have been documented as a factor in determining the

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<sup>52</sup> Patricia K. Tong et al., *Enhancing Family Stability during a Permanent Change of Station: A Review of Disruptions and Policies* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2018), ix.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Tong et al, *Enhancing Family Stability during a Permanent Change of Station*, 6.

desire to remain in the military.<sup>56</sup> Of the 9,800 spouses who participated in this study, fifty-eight percent of military spouses reported they needed to work while another eighty-two percent reported they wanted to work. The result of the moves often led to unemployment (or underemployment), meaning they were unable to find work or were only able to work part time when a fulltime job was desired or needed. Another complication was that regardless of the credentials or qualifications of a spouse, many were only able to find immediate work that was often below their qualification levels or outside their areas of expertise.<sup>57</sup> Also disconcerting was that fifty-nine percent of military spouses indicated they would not tell a potential employer of their military affiliation because it made them less likely to be hired and if hired, they often felt passed over for opportunities because employers did not feel compelled to invest in a “temporary worker.”<sup>58</sup>

Regarding impacts on children, a variety of issues have been directly attributed to PCS moves. One example is the significant time parents often spent time with the schools to determine curriculum expectation differences between the old and news schools. From the child integration point of view, it was widely reported there were psycho-social complications, which often included mental health issues, behavioral problems, as well as instances of substance abuse. As parents of younger children, it was often a struggle to find child care facilities at the new location, which resulted in navigating long waiting lists or “starting over” at the new assignment location.<sup>59</sup> Although not all-inclusive, these issues associated with PCS moves were contributive to marital problem reports, which led to instability in the relationships

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 8.

between parents as well as parents and children.<sup>60</sup> Other detractors from family quality of life satisfaction were the role of family separations induced from servicemember deployments.

## Deployment Effects on Family

In 2016, the *Military Times* posted the results of a RAND-led study that indicated there were “generally few long-term effects from deployment.” The data was derived from a Deployment Life Study that documented responses from 2,724 families from all services. While that report cited short term, adverse effects incurred by a family during the pre-deployment, deployment, post-employment phases, the study suggested that normalization does occur on a more consistent basis. These results did not account for cases where servicemembers were injured during the deployment, which often resulted in issues ranging from marital relationship problems to substance abuse.<sup>61</sup> Since then, there are other sources that indicate deployments related issues, including one developed specifically for the Air Force and will be discussed in the next section.

## Internal Air Force Challenges

The issues mentioned in the previous section were designed to outline factors that affect the desire to join or remain in the military but are ultimately beyond direct control of senior Air Force leadership. This section will focus in the factors that are at least partially if not completely controllable through Air Force policy review or revised legislation.

## Force Shaping

In 2014, the Department of Defense (DoD) required all services to reduce manpower for savings. Therefore, the Air Force cut more than 19,800 airmen, enlisted and officers, to include

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<sup>60</sup> Tong et al, *Enhancing Family Stability during a Permanent Change of Station*, 8.

<sup>61</sup> Karen Jowers, “Study: Families experience generally few long-term effects from deployment,” *Military Times*, April 11, 2016, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/1629DB70AC1AEC90?p=NewsBank>.

many in critical career fields. From an enlisted perspective, the maintenance community, which is arguably still recovering, suffered severe operational consequences as a result of force shaping.<sup>62</sup> For officers, critical manning became a reality as many were forcibly separated or served with enhanced selective early retirement board (E-SERB). Others chose to control their own fates and accepted the temporary early retirement authority (TERA), which aggravated the growing critical manning problem.<sup>63</sup> While these actions achieved the desired reduction effects, the results are still being felt. The Air Force was indeed successful in separating many non-productive airmen; however, a significant number left willingly after having lost faith in Air Force. For some not separated that remain in the Air Force today, those memories remain and still skews views on the Air Force's sincerity to care for its airmen and their families. It will take time before that "dark legacy" is overcome by Air Force leadership.<sup>64</sup>

## The Airmen Shortage

Ceaseless Air Force global operations continues to highlight shortfalls in specific officer and enlisted career fields. Without these specialists, key Air Force missions are not possible, requiring action to improve the likelihood of their retention. These missing airmen are only part of the problem, however. Current Air Force manning equates to 321,444 airmen, comprised of 62,361 officers and 259,083 enlisted airmen.<sup>65</sup> To meet the current operations tempo (OPS

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<sup>62</sup> Bennie J. Davis III, "Insatiable Demand - RPA maintainers ensure key capabilities are available to combatant commanders," *Airman*, April 24, 2017, accessed January 19, 2019, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/163FDF6893923930?p=AFNB>.

<sup>63</sup> Jenn Rafael, "Cuts by career field," *Air Force Times*, November 24, 2014, accessed January 19, 2019, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/152168BA527138D0?p=AFNB>.

<sup>64</sup> Christopher Karns, "Sound off! – Regaining Airmen's trust is key to improvement," *Air Force Times*, October 15, 2018, accessed December 11, 2018, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/16F126D7D0295828?p=AFNB>.

<sup>65</sup> "Demographics," US Air Force, December 31, 2018, accessed November 7, 2018, <https://www.afpc.af.mil/About/Air-Force-Demographics/>.

TEMPO), Gen. Goldfein has advocated for an additional 29,000 airmen to meet an end strength of 350,000 airmen by 2024 to guarantee growth in the space, nuclear, cyber and maintenance career fields. It should be noted the additional airmen requested are not only to enable future missions,” but also replace 20,000 airmen separated in 2014 as a result of the DoD-directed manning drawdown.<sup>66</sup>

The most visible manning problem indication in the Air Force has been the inability to retain and replace pilots. On a lesser scale, other rated career fields such as navigators and air battle managers are also lacking numerically. In terms of pilots, there is currently a 2,000-pilot shortage, most notably from the tactical fighter aircraft community. Pilots in bomber and mobility communities are also manned below operational requirement levels. In the case of remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) pilots, they have become critically manned in 2017 for the first time. Resolving this shortfall requires increased pilot production, which is simply not producing the pilots at a rate to compensate for continued losses. For instance, current pilot production is at 1,200 pilots per year, however; 1,600 pilots produced are what is required to sustain current operations in all platforms. Changes are being made to begin producing 1,400 pilots in the next few years, which is clearly below the level required for continued operations. It should be no surprise that non-rated communities are suffering from manning shortfalls as well.<sup>67</sup>

The maintenance and intelligence communities, while not as visible, are also manned at levels unsustainable for continued operations. The maintenance community was also severely degraded as a result of the 2014 manning drawdowns, where at least 1,392 airmen were

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<sup>66</sup> Stephen Losey, “USAF: 29,000 more airmen needed – Several manning gaps plague the force,” *Air Force Times*, January 16, 2017, accessed December 11, 2018, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/resources/doc/nb/news/1629A537944EB330?p=AFNB>.

<sup>67</sup> Stephen Losey, “‘We are going to break this force’-Senior leaders warn about the impact of ops tempo, cuts,” *Air Force Times*, January 16, 2017, accessed December 11, 2018, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/resources/doc/nb/news/1629A537944EB330?p=AFNB>.

separated for numerous reasons, often for records blemishes due to disciplinary actions or performance report mark downs for less than optimal job performance. At other times, these issues would have been survivable to a career, but were used as the factors to decide to retain or separate airmen. This ultimately left fewer airmen to face the increasingly difficult challenge of sustaining flight operations. This problem was complicated by numerous factors, all at the expense of these same few airmen. First, a great strain was placed on the community when the decision to not cancel the A-10 program occurred, which only added to the workload once manning requirements were added for the F-35.<sup>68</sup> For maintainers in older, aging fleets, the loss of manning resulted in a growing lack of the corporate experience required to keep aircraft flying. This also meant added workload and stress for the remaining airmen, often resulting in twelve-hour work days and the needs to work two to three weekends a month. These demands become overwhelming, especially when simultaneously trying to balance family, physical fitness, and additional duties.<sup>69</sup> While it has been recently reported that the maintenance community has numerically recovered from the 4,000-member deficit, the lack of experience will continue to hamper flying operations.<sup>70</sup>

The intelligence career field is little better, specifically in the captain and major ranks. In 2014, the lack of manning and expertise garnered senior Air Force leadership intervention to

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<sup>68</sup> Stephen Losey, "The drawdown blew a hole in the Air Force's maintenance ranks. How it's digging its way out," *Air Force Times*, March 5, 2017, accessed December 20, 2018, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2017/03/05/the-drawdown-blew-a-hole-in-the-air-forces-maintenance-ranks-how-it-s-digging-its-way-out/>.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Stephen Losey, "The Air Force still has a serious maintainer staffing problem, GAO says — but no strategy to fix it," *Air Force Times*, February 9, 2019. Accessed February 9, 2019, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2019/02/08/the-air-force-still-has-a-serious-maintainer-staffing-problem-gao-says-but-no-strategy-to-fix-it/>.

restore the numbers needed to ensure national security.<sup>71</sup> While retaining the talent already in the Air Force must remain a priority, recruiting first time airmen continues to be increasingly challenging, but imperative to the Air Force future.

## Interest to Join the Air Force

It has already been noted that interest to join the military is waning, and this has been acknowledged by senior Air Force leadership. In response to this condition, Secretary Wilson has asked if the military has become a warrior caste where the same families have provided the replacements for the military ranks. If true, the ceaseless OPS TEMPO burden continues to afflict these same families that are now losing interest in continuing service. Interestingly and difficult to quantify, Secretary Wilson also partially attributes Hollywood representations of service members as non-conducive to instilling a desire to serve.<sup>72</sup> Regardless of the actual extent to which the Hollywood military life depictions negatively influence recruiting, it is still just one of the many factors detracting from recruiting effectiveness.

## Recruiting Future Airmen

To this point, the Air Force has been successful in meeting recruiting goals in spite of fewer available recruits. In 2018, the Air Force outperformed the Army, which fell 6,500 soldiers short of their recruiting goal, but fell behind the Navy and Marine Corps which achieved their highest recruiting numbers in years. In specific terms, Air Force recruiting topped its 29,700 goal by recruiting 31,795 airmen. It did so by adding previously enlisted servicemembers, as well

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<sup>71</sup> Debbie Gildea, "Air Force implements intel officer retention program," US Air Force, August 7, 2014, accessed November 21, 2018, <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/493971/af-implements-intel-officer-retention-program/>.

<sup>72</sup> Panzino, "Warrior caste."

active duty line officers and commissioned health professionals.<sup>73</sup> While this success is critical to long term Air Force viability, Major General Garrett Harencak, commander of Air Force Recruiting, warns “As the military ramps up and the world becomes more volatile-at the same time the economy improves and fewer young people are eligible to serve-recruiters will need to cast a wider net.”<sup>74</sup> Changes have been made to compete for the diminished recruit pool, but reiterates the need to understand influences that affect the desire to stay in the Air Force.

## Personnel Management

How the Air Force chooses who gets promoted or separated has long drawn significant ire. Prior to the 2014 drawdown, disenfranchised airmen leaving the Air Force as a result of perceived unfairness drew little attention largely because their absences did not constitute a significant combat capability loss. Since 2014, promotion and force reduction policies have been determined as detrimental to long term Air Force health, especially in the earlier mentioned pilot and maintenance communities amongst others.

## Promotions

A driving premise to Air Force promotions has been the required completion of rank milestones to ensure the ability of a long-term career. Failure to advance on time meant being required to leave the service if the next rank was not achieved within a specific time period. This concept applied to both enlisted and officer members, although applied in slightly different ways, regardless of their skill sets. These rules, called “up or out,” did by design remove some low performing airmen, but also contributed the experience void felt in today’s Air Force. From an enlisted perspective, the ranks hurt most by these policies were at the staff and technical

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<sup>73</sup> Stephen Losey, “Air Force hits more modest recruiting goal in 2018,” *Air Force Times*, October 11, 2018, accessed January 15, 2019, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2018/10/11/air-force-hits-more-modest-recruiting-goal-in-2018/>.

<sup>74</sup> Harkins, “How the Military Recruits when 70% of Americans Can’t Serve.”

sergeant ranks, which represent a significant level of service time, education, and, most importantly, experience. This loss leaves lasting military experience gaps as they depart for a civilian sector that are often too willing to hire them.<sup>75</sup> This same concept was also applied to officers who were not promoted by certain career timeline milestones.<sup>76</sup> The Air Force consequence, like enlisted members, was the loss of invaluable expertise that had taken the Air Force years to create. A clear example of this is the fact that it takes ten years to recover the experience of a pilot that separates.<sup>77</sup> Regrettably, as airmen numbers continue to diminish as a result of these policies, those who remain continue to struggle to meet demands that at one point had more hands with which to help.

### Task Load Factors Influencing Recruiting and Retention

Due to the continued limited number of hours available per day, airmen can only accomplish so much to meet professional and personal demands on their time. A significant point of discussion, as a result of fewer airmen completing the same if not more demanding task load incurred from the Air Force OPS TEMPO, is the loss of available schedulable time, known within the Air Force as “white space.” This is a term that describes both an individual airmen and units time to accomplish primary job training, additional duty execution, ancillary training, professional military education, career broadening opportunities, advanced education accomplishment, subordinate mentorship, all the while caring for one’s family. It has become a major initiative by Air Force leadership at all levels to protect this white space from items that

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<sup>75</sup> “19 things you need to know about 2019 – A Bigger Air Force, a disturbing pilot shortage, readiness challenges & more,” *Air Force Times*, December 31, 2018, accessed January 19, 2019, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/170D286C9AAA0CC0?p=AFNB>.

<sup>76</sup> Brian T. Stahl, *Blunting the Spear: Why Good People Get Out* (Drew Paper No. 24, Air University, March 2015), 111.

<sup>77</sup> Christopher M. Carson, *I Hear What You are Saying: Analysis of USAF Rated Officer Comments from the 2015 Military Decisions Survey* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2017), 95.

jeopardize the accomplishment of key tasks, which if not resolved, result in loss of combat capability and degraded future capacity building efforts.

## Killing 'Queep'

In recent years, unit climate surveys, discussions with senior leadership, and the remarks of airmen during service exit surveys have repeatedly identified detriments to airmen white space. "Queep" is among the top complaints and is a phrase that corresponds to or is defined as duties and tasks not directly contributive to preparing for today's mission or in development of future combat capability. There are numerous contributing factors to "queep."

Additional duties are the largest component of "queep." These duties, intended as unit sustaining and compliance functions, are defined and regulated in Air Force Instruction 38-206, "Additional Duty Management." This regulation specifies regulatory functions and processes that are mandatory for all units, even though for many units, those conventions were not applicable or created more work than the damage they were preventing.<sup>78</sup> Another component of "queep" are ancillary training requirements. While philosophically important, some topics and their required frequency for completion have become burdensome to airmen trying to accomplish primary missions. It has been estimated that completion of all ancillary training requirements takes in excess of sixty hours per airman each year. Examples of ancillary training topics include fire extinguisher use, bullying, sexual assault, as well as computer-based training on counter-improvised explosive devices. Problems noted with ancillary training have included redundancy between training requirements, as they are developed by different organizations, or are unnecessarily time consuming, or are required to be completed on a basis that is not

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<sup>78</sup> "Reducing Additional Duties," US Air Force, accessed December 12, 2018, [https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/SECAF/160816\\_Airmen%27s\\_Time\\_Memo.pdf?ver=2016-08-19-123457-897](https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/SECAF/160816_Airmen%27s_Time_Memo.pdf?ver=2016-08-19-123457-897).

contributive mission accomplishment. A final aspect of “queep” are manpower requirements imposed on units that also detract from mission accomplishment. These include unit requirements to provide “unit tax representatives,” which removes airmen from units to assist base airmen in completion of their taxes. Another of many examples is the requirement for a unit voting representative, who is the unit conduit in assisting assigned airmen vote in their respective home states. Another couple of examples include unit public affairs representatives and awards managers.<sup>79</sup> Despite the fact that queep has existed for some time, the time taken from airmen, especially after the 2014 drawdown, is now unbearable for many units trying to meet all operational demands while still taking care of families, again, with fewer airmen left behind to accomplish it all.<sup>80</sup> The effects of queep are more significant to some career fields than others however, most notably in the pilot and maintenance career fields.

In 2018, a survey was conducted among 2,620 aircrew members and additional duties and queep were among the top grievances.<sup>81</sup> This frustration dated back to 2015, where thirty-seven percent of pilots separating cited additional duties as a factor in the decision to leave.<sup>82</sup> In spite of offered retention bonuses which will be discussed in greater detail later, the disdain for

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<sup>79</sup> Stephen Losey, “The Air Force uproots queep - Say goodbye to redundant training unrelated to primary duties,” *Air Force Times*, November 14, 2016, accessed January 18, 2019, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/1629B10EE4058AD8?p=AFNB>.

<sup>80</sup> Stephen Losey, “Reversing the drawdown - The Air Force is just now recovering from devastating cuts to its critical maintainer ranks,” *Air Force Times*, March 13, 2017, accessed January 18, 2019, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/16374D2822BDF390?p=AFNB>.

<sup>81</sup> Jesse Friedel and Matt Cancian, “Difficult Decisions: Practical Policy for the Air Force’s Pilot retention crisis,” *War on the Rocks*, September 27, 2018, accessed November 10, 2018, [https://warontherocks.com/2018/09/difficult-decisions-practical-policy-for-the-air-forces-pilot-retention-crisis/?utm\\_source=Sailthru&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=ebb%2028.09.18&utm\\_term=Editorial%20-%20Early%20Bird%20Brief](https://warontherocks.com/2018/09/difficult-decisions-practical-policy-for-the-air-forces-pilot-retention-crisis/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ebb%2028.09.18&utm_term=Editorial%20-%20Early%20Bird%20Brief).

<sup>82</sup> David Max Korzen, “The Air Force’s ‘Quiet Crisis’,” *RealClear Defense*, August 15, 2017, accessed January 18, 2019, [https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/08/15/the\\_air\\_forces\\_quiet\\_crisis\\_112052.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/08/15/the_air_forces_quiet_crisis_112052.html).

additional duties exceeded the attractiveness of the money being offered to stay.<sup>83</sup> Maintainers are also hampered by never ending queep. It has been estimated that additional duties have been understood to add up to three extra duty hours per day, on top of common twelve-hour work days to sustain flying operations.<sup>84</sup> The maintenance community was also very vocal about the immense computer-based training (CBT) workload. Forty-two courses were identified as part of their annual training, which does not include primary mission training or training only accomplishable in person.<sup>85</sup>

Regrettably, professional military education (PME) has also fallen into the queep category. In concept, Air Force developmental education (DE) is designed to “expand knowledge and increase understanding of the role of air, space and cyberspace power in times of peace and war.”<sup>86</sup> To foster the transformation of airmen into a “professional corps” ready for joint and future operations, the Air Force inadvertently drove requirements for duplicative PME accomplishment. Officers, for example, were directed to complete distance learning (DL) PME, known as “in correspondence,” to enable being competitive for in residence PME. This was of course accomplished during an airmen’s “free time,” which further contributed to loss of airman white space.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Stephen Losey, “Ending the pilot exodus-will new bonuses, incentives work?” *Air Force Times*, June 18, 2018, accessed January 18, 2019, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/16C8E11B3AFA1560?p=NewsBank>.

<sup>84</sup> Losey, “Reversing the drawdown.”

<sup>85</sup> Robert Barnett, “AF takes initial steps to reduce training unrelated to primary missions,” US Air Force, October 31, 2016, accessed January 20, 2019, <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/990772/af-takes-initial-steps-to-reduce-training-unrelated-to-primary-missions/>.

<sup>86</sup> Secretary of the Air Force, Air Force Instruction (AFI) 36-2301, *Developmental Education* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 23013), 38.

<sup>87</sup> Stahl, “Blunting the Spear,” 111.

In summary, queep, although the rationale behind its components is well intended, have been devastating to Air Force operations. From degrading mission readiness, causing atrophy to key skill sets, and sacrificing family time, senior Air Force leadership has indicated understanding of this problem. Queep not only hurts short term retention, but also creates problems for years to come.<sup>88</sup> As the Air Force continues finding ways to increase the time available to airmen, it must also continue to address the perception of Air Force acceptance of diversity which is especially critical when attempting to appeal to younger societal generations both considering joining or staying in the Air Force.

### Perceptions of Opportunities and Acceptance

Up front and very clearly, the Air Force continues to express its intolerance for discrimination. A recently visible example of this was after the racially charged “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, where protestors from white supremacist and anti-racist protestor groups clashed. After the violence, each service chief publicly condemned the extremist behavior, saying there was no place for that behavior in our services. Gen. Goldfein reaffirmed the Air Force position of non-acceptance for discrimination and has vowed to act quickly in response to such acts.<sup>89</sup> Unfortunately, there are still occurrences that receive national attention, and which degrades the Air Force narrative.

One highly-publicized event occurred in September 2018 at the Air Force Academy Preparatory school, involving racial slurs written on the door of an African American cadet. In yet another nationally covered example, on January 26, 2018, a technical sergeant (TSgt)

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<sup>88</sup> Barnett, “AF takes initial steps to reduce training unrelated to primary missions.”

<sup>89</sup> Andrew deGrandpre, “Trump’s generals condemn Charlottesville racism — while trying not to offend the president,” *The Washington Post*, August 16, 2017, accessed January 3, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/08/16/trumps-generals-condemn-charlottesville-racism-while-trying-not-to-offend-the-president/?utm\\_term=.978547d71d6e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/08/16/trumps-generals-condemn-charlottesville-racism-while-trying-not-to-offend-the-president/?utm_term=.978547d71d6e).

stationed at Nellis Air Force Base posted a “racially charged” Facebook video rant, in uniform, where she inappropriately shared her perception of the disrespectful attitudes of her two female African American subordinates.<sup>90</sup> In a final example, on approximately June 10, 2018, a new Air Force Reserve recruit in St. Louis was filmed with others, while drinking underage, in a vehicle claiming to be going “[expletive] hunting,” using a highly derogative term for African Americans.<sup>91</sup> While these events appear isolated within the Air Force, all services face similar challenges. This regrettably correlates to the earlier mentioned *Military Times* poll where respondents, including those from the Air Force, claim racism is an ongoing problem both societally and in military ranks.<sup>92</sup> These examples clearly illustrate the continued need to punish offenders as they directly threaten the Air Force’s ability to recruit and/or retain talent. Another area the Air Force strives for improvement is ensuring airmen the freedom of religion.

## Freedom of Religious Choice

Religious freedom has always been globally contentious and in the Air Force it is no different. From an Air Force perspective, much of the current religious freedom issues coincidentally began in 2014, when an updated AFI 1-1, *The Air Force Standards*, was released with updated guidance on religious accommodations. The updates were poorly received, as they altered the previous unit leadership direction of “that in exercising their right of religious free expression, they do not degrade morale, good order and discipline in the Air Force.” The initial

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<sup>90</sup> Stephen Losey, “Nellis NCO who posted racially charged Facebook rant gets busted down in rank,” *Air Force Times*, April 11, 2018, accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2018/04/11/nellis-nco-who-posted-racially-charged-facebook-rant-gets-busted-down-in-rank/>.

<sup>91</sup> Oriana Pawlyk, “Air Force Reserve kicks out recruit after racist video surfaces,” *Military.com*, June 15, 2018, accessed January 19, 2019, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2018/06/15/air-force-reserve-kicks-out-recruit-after-racist-video-surfaces.html>.

<sup>92</sup> Shane, “A survey of active-duty troops.”

2014 revision was amended to “expression of sincerely held beliefs (conscience, moral principles, or religious beliefs) shall not be prohibited unless the expression would have a real, not hypothetical, adverse impact on military readiness, unit cohesion, good order and discipline, health and safety, and mission accomplishment. Much debate ensued over what constituted “real, not hypothetical,” giving the perception commanders could discriminate based on the wide interpretation. This resulted in the CSAF, then General Mark Welsh, reviewing the policy.<sup>93</sup>

An additional aggravation for Air Force religious tolerance centered on the phrase in the federal oath, “So help me God.” As of 2014, the Air Force was the only service that still required taking the oath to include that phrase. After two instances where airmen were barred from reenlistment for refusing to say the oath as directed, Air Force lawyers and Pentagon leadership concluded that forcing airmen to say those words was unconstitutional and infringed on the freedom of religion. Yet, further guidance was provided to ensure it was understood the words “So help me God” were to be chosen or not for use by the person taking the oath, not the preference of the person administering the oath. In the end, “So help me God” has been optional since 2014, although scar tissue on this topic remains.<sup>94</sup> More recent and shocking examples of religious intolerance have come to light, which has drawn additional criticism on the perception of the Air Force’s lack of toleration of individual religious beliefs.

In September 2017, an Air Force chaplain posted on the website *Barbwire.com* thoughts that sparked national media attention. Captain Sonny Hernandez, an Air Force Reserve chaplain assigned to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, criticized Christian servicemembers who “rely on

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<sup>93</sup> Stephen Losey, “Air Force updates religious expression rules,” *Air Force Times*, November 11, 2014, accessed December 14, 2018, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/education-transition/jobs/2014/11/11/air-force-updates-religious-expression-rules/>.

<sup>94</sup> Kristin Davis, “So help me God’ not required,” *Air Force Times*, September 29, 2014, accessed January 20, 2019, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/150EF3ABAC77B678?p=NewsBank>.

the Constitution, and not Christ” as the basis for protecting religious freedom. He continued by saying “Christian service members who openly profess and support the rights of Muslims, Buddhists, and all other anti-Christian worldviews to practice their religions-because the language in the Constitution permits-are grossly in error, and deceived.” He closed by saying people who partake in activities such as using the Constitution as the basis for religious freedom “serve Satan.” This became hotly contested, quickly getting the attention of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF), who filed requests for his actions to be placed for Inspector General review for infringement of religious freedom.<sup>95</sup> An even more publicized example that touched Air Force acceptance policies on two fronts was a case in 2018 where an Air Force colonel was removed from command for refusing to sign a spouse letter of appreciation for a same sex marriage based on his religious beliefs against same sex marriages. He appealed this action, and after review, senior Air Force leadership reversed the adverse action, citing “he had the religious right to refuse signing the same sex appreciation letter.”<sup>96</sup> This case represents an Air Force attempt to protect an airmen’s freedom of religious practice, as it is understood as a factor that influences the success of recruiting and retaining airmen. Unfortunately, the success for this case came at the expense of protecting the rights of another diverse community, also within the Air Force.

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<sup>95</sup> Nina Burleigh, “Christians in the U.S. military ‘serve Satan’ if they tolerate other religions, Air Force Chaplain says,” *Newsweek*, September 15, 2017, accessed December 20, 2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/chaplain-urges-service-members-reject-religious-tolerance-665614>.

<sup>96</sup> Jennifer H. Svan, “Air Force: Colonel had religious right to refuse signing same-sex spouse appreciation letter,” *Stars & Stripes*, April 3, 2018, accessed December 20, 2018, <https://www.stripes.com/news/air-force-colonel-had-religious-right-to-refuse-signing-same-sex-spouse-appreciation-letter-1.520156>.

## LGBTQ Integration into the Air Force

The Air Force is steadfastly committed to preventing discrimination based on sexual orientation; however, resistance to acceptance still exists, which can affect the decision to join or stay. Historically, in accordance with DADT direction imposed on the services, the Air Force mandated that direct questions on sexual orientation were not permissible, although airmen suspected of homosexuality were investigated and separated. Once DADT lifted, the Air Force adjusted to foster diversity, which does not mean there have not been setbacks.

In 2018, a case occurred in New Mexico that gained national level attention. At Kirtland AFB, New Mexico, Col Leland Bohannon was removed from command after refusing to sign a spouse appreciation letter for a retiring Master Sergeant (MSgt) married to a same-sex spouse. Upon recognition the certificate was to be provided to a same-sex spouse, Col. Bohannon sought a religious accommodation, stating his religious beliefs would not permit him to sign a letter he perceived as “optional” and “unofficial” and could be construed as his personal endorsement. He notified his leadership of his unwillingness to sign the letter, at which point his two-star general supervisor agreed to sign the letter in Col Bohannon’s stead. When the retiring MSgt discovered Col. Bohannon refused to sign the letter, he filed an Equal Opportunity complaint, asserting discrimination based on sexual orientation. As a result of the investigation, Col. Bohannon was relieved of command in October and removed from consideration for promotion to brigadier general. Col. Bohannon immediately appealed, which gained congressional support and led to a decision reversal from Secretary Wilson, who stated in a letter that Col. Bohannon “had the right to exercise his sincerely held beliefs and do not lawfully discriminate when he declined to sign the certificate.” The decision was also made to expunge Col. Bohannon’s records of the adverse event. This Air Force and congressionally-supported decision drew

immediate criticism from multiple organizations, citing the use of religious beliefs to discriminate against homosexual servicemembers and spouses.<sup>97</sup>

The first to respond was the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF), a group who advocates for the constitutional rights of servicemembers. They claimed that in the course of exercising religious beliefs, one should not be allowed to use those beliefs for discriminatory purposes. Coming to the defense of Col. Bohannon was First Liberty, who supports the rights of Christian servicemembers and argued the spouse appreciation letters are not legally required. They followed by citing DoD guidance which states “military departments will accommodate religious beliefs of servicemembers unless doing so could adversely affect military readiness, unit cohesion, and good order and discipline.” From their perspective, Col. Bohannon had not created such effects. This was quickly disputed by a third organization, the American Military Partner Association, which is the nation’s largest representative of military LGBTQ spouses and families. Their assertion was that Air Force leadership and congressional support for the reversal in favor of Col. Bohannon signified a “severe failure of leadership” by enabling the message sent by Col. Bohannon of disapproval “of every same-sex spouse that supports their servicemember throughout a military career.” The MRFF remains concerned rulings as this set the precedent for a “Pandora’s box of civil rights violations.”<sup>98</sup> The decision in favor of Col. Bohannon stood in the end. In Secretary Wilson’s letter stating her approval of the reversal of adverse action against Col. Bohannon, she wrote “The Air Force has the duty to treat people fairly and without discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, or sexual orientation and (Bohannon) met that duty by having a more senior officer sign the certificate.” Secretary Wilson’s response has been heavily contested, especially by some who view this statement

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<sup>97</sup> Svan, “Air Force: Colonel had religious right to refuse signing.”

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

consistent with another she made in 2006 regarding her disapproval of homosexuality. That statement, although contentious, was made long before accepting the role of SECAF.<sup>99</sup>

It is clear LGBTQ servicemembers have long suffered for years. In a 2016 Blue Star Families Military Family Lifestyle Survey, LGBTQ members, indicated they felt Tricare provided insufficient medical care. Although specifics were not provided on what was deemed insufficient, details were provided to leadership who are currently discussing options.<sup>100</sup> As LGBTQ members continually face adversity, inequality for women is another long-term struggle.

## Gender Equality

In regard to gender equality and discrimination, regrettably the Air Force has not been impervious. Like other forms of discrimination, the Air Force is working diligently to close the gender-based opportunity gap; however, data existents that signify more effort is needed. It should be noted that not all opportunities women have lost in the past were not the result of deliberate discrimination, but were circumstantial or policies gone awry, and yet still yielded the same dreadful effect, diminished opportunities for female airmen.

In 2018, RAND published an enlightening study that addressed barriers to female officer retention in the Air Force. The data was derived from a 2016 survey which drew from the experiences of 295 female officers across twelve installations. The intent was to identify “key retention factors” that could be used when considering current and future policies.<sup>101</sup> Among

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<sup>99</sup> Scott Maucione, “Wilson has the chops, but business connections may crash Air Force nominee,” *Federal News Network*, January 26, 2017, accessed January 20, 2019, <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/defense/2017/01/air-force-secretary-pick-experience-worries/>.

<sup>100</sup> Karen Jowers, “Op tempo still stressing military families - Quality-of-life issues top list of concerns,” *Air Force Times*, December 26, 2016, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/1629DB70AC1AEC90?p=NewsBank>.

<sup>101</sup> Kirsten M. Keller et al., *Addressing Barriers to Female Officer Retention in the Air Force* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2018), iii.

the biggest discovery was the small number of female officers at the highest leadership levels, which was a trend amongst the other services as well, largely based on the fewer numbers of available female officers. This study also detailed four additional factors that degraded retention desirability: 1) family and personal issues, 2) career, 3) work environment and 3) broader Air Force and military issues. Family and personal focused on the personal versus professional balance conflict, but in general, stemmed from issues as a result of starting a family. Aspects of this revealed difficulties in timing pregnancies with deployments, balancing joint work schedules, and negotiating with new Childcare Development Centers (CDCs) as just a few of the problems associated with balancing family and Air Force demands.<sup>102</sup> Regarding pregnancies, some women reported “pregnancy discrimination,” which caused them to miss key career opportunities, career broadening assignments or in-residence PME. These perceptions reinforced the hesitation felt by many women to avoid any mention of pregnancy plans when doing career counseling sessions.<sup>103</sup> These problems were exacerbated when coupled with seeking joint spouse assignments, where a slew of additional logistical problems arose when the couples could not be co-located, but where childcare was required.<sup>104</sup>

Career was the second significant factor impacting female retention as flexibility, ability to cross train, and future civilian opportunities all required balancing, which could be difficult even with the most permissive of leadership.<sup>105</sup> Additional career stress was incurred when it became clear in some career fields that the path to a successful career required completion of rigid, timeline-oriented requirements that would take one “off career path” if not met. The

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<sup>102</sup> Keller et al, *Addressing Barriers to Female Officer Retention*, iii.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

results were often the loss of leadership opportunity competitiveness, contributing to the ongoing condition of few females in senior leadership positions. Work environment factors include the common perception that women who do achieve senior Air Force leadership roles are rarely seen married with children, reinforcing the belief making that rank is not possible without the sacrifice of family. Another regrettable but still often-noted observation, especially in male dominated career fields, is the existence of the “old boy’s network,” coupled with sexual harassment experiences. These competitive career fields often led to “burnout and work-life challenges.”<sup>106</sup> Finally addressed were the broader Air Force and military factors.” Here, the effects of the 2014 drawdown and forced separations are still seen, where a “perceived lack of job security or instability” was influencing the decision to stay in or not. End game, these four factors are heavily responsible for the current state of female under-representation in higher leadership levels even though senior Air Force leadership has made it clear diversity and retention of talent are critical to the future of the Air Force.<sup>107</sup> Many women have worked hard and proven their worth in a largely male-driven profession, leaving the Air Force to continue finding ways to ensure equality, regardless of gender. Protecting airmen from physical harm is another area that also requires constant leadership influence.

## Sexual Assault

Due to the ongoing problem of sexual assaults in all service branches, the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) has directed all services to provide education on recognizing, preventing and reporting sexual assault. While no one believes this sad crime will ever cease, the intent is to mitigate occurrences while ensuring airmen are aware of their options if they are ever victimized. To ensure continued emphasis on eradicating sexual assault, the SECDEF has

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<sup>106</sup> Keller et al, *Addressing Barriers to Female Officer Retention*, xi.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., vii.

required each branch to provide annual updates on the progress, statistics and way forward for their respective sexual assault programs. Although it is undeniable that senior Air Force leadership is dedicated to stopping these tragic events, the results were grim.

In its 2017 report, the Air Force reported having received 1,480 assault reports. While that number is already staggering, even more alarming is the estimation that only one in three assaults are reported, reinforcing the fact that airmen have and continue to be victimized.<sup>108</sup> A closer look into the Air Force sexual assault problem provided more data indicating the long road ahead. A RAND report that included data dating back to 2014 listed locations where sexual assaults most often occurred. Sadly, they were at Air Education and Training Command (AETC) bases, which provide initial Air Force entry and job skills training. The three top locations, which were also where undergraduate pilot training occurs, included; Vance, Laughlin, and Altus AFBs.<sup>109</sup> This report also described the most common type of victims, lower ranking enlisted females. Offenders were found to be both males and females, although the most common perpetrators were described as “lone offenders, male and known to the victim.”<sup>110</sup>

Air Force leadership fully recognizes that this must be addressed and views this not only as a terrible situation for any person to which to be subjected but sees this as a threat to long term Air Force readiness, as it prevents new airmen from joining and jeopardizes unit readiness for those already serving.

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<sup>108</sup> Secretary of the Air Force, *Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military*, March 27, 2018, accessed January 21, 2019, [http://sapr.mil/public/docs/reports/FY17\\_Annual/Enclosure\\_3\\_Department\\_of\\_the\\_Air\\_Force.pdf](http://sapr.mil/public/docs/reports/FY17_Annual/Enclosure_3_Department_of_the_Air_Force.pdf).

<sup>109</sup> Stephen Losey, “In the Air Force, sexual assault risk is greatest at AETC bases,” *Air Force Times*, September 21, 2018, accessed January 21, 2019, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2018/09/21/rand-report-in-air-force-sexual-assault-risk-greatest-at-aetc-bases/>.

<sup>110</sup> Laura L. Miller et al., *Air Force Sexual Assault Situations, Settings and Offender Behaviors* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2018), 70.

## Quality of Life for Air Force Families

The Air Force has always strived to take care of airmen and their families, but it was said best in 2009 by then-Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (CMSAF), James A. Roy, in a speech to the House Armed Services Subcommittee on the Military Personnel oversight of Family Support Programs in Washington D.C. He said, “Our American Airmen have answered our nation's call to serve,” following with the leadership mantra that “developing and caring for Airmen's families are one of our top priorities. We have focused much of our efforts in this area.”<sup>111</sup> While his words can be seen as obligatory leadership rhetoric, the time and actions spent in this arena are vast but insufficient and dangerous to future airmen recruiting and retention if not resolved. While many quality of life issues as a result of OPS TEMPO and queep have been already addressed, family moves are a perpetual issue that is degrading desirability to serve or continue serving.

## The Effects of PCS and Deployments on Air Force Families

An earlier section of this paper discussed PCS impacts to military families, where some of the complications reflected echoed Air Force hardship. Seeking greater detail, senior Air Force leadership enlisted RAND in 2015 to undertake another study to understand the retention problems in the rated community, which provided feedback addressing family dissatisfaction with PCSs and deployments which were directly causal to a diminished desire to join or serve in the Air Force. The comments provided were from exiting officers and were clearly indicative of a small community within the Air Force but likely reflective of large, Air Force wide sentiments. As a result of both PCSs and deployments, spouses negatively reported employment complications

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<sup>111</sup> *Caring for Airmen and their Families* (Washington DC: Remarks to the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel on the Oversight of Family Support Programs, July 22, 2009), accessed January 21, 2019, <https://www.af.mil/About-Us/Speeches-Archive/Display/Article/143917/caring-for-airmen-and-their-families/>.

such as “potential loss of seniority/earning potential in the civilian sector.”<sup>112</sup> The frustrations were further aggravated when comments indicated deployments of their airmen loved ones to non-primary career field related deployments.<sup>113</sup> Adding perceived insult to injury, many of these deployments of durations up to 365 days.<sup>114</sup> Frustration with deployments was compounded by the perception that higher Air Force headquarters did not advocate for airmen by forcing Air Force manpower requestors to ensure the deployments were valid, but were providing automatic “yes” then tasking airmen and their units.<sup>115</sup> Other comments from current airmen included the challenges of negotiating the conundrum of accepting either a non-desired assignment or a deployment to a non-preferred location, with little flexibility or say regardless of personal situation.<sup>116</sup> Finally, it was also noted by recruiters, a growing hesitation to join due to the unpopularity of the war in Iraq.<sup>117</sup> With many facets of society changing the desire to join or serve, another obvious area to review is the state of the Air Force culture which is also directly controllable by senior Air Force leadership.

## Air Force Culture

When looking at the macro-organizational culture of the Air Force, Carl Builder’s *The Masks of War* made several interesting observations to explain some of its behaviors. He noted that unlike other services, the Air Force is the only branch that has had to “defend its role so publicly in recent memory.” The premise of the National Security Act of 1947 which enabled the

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<sup>112</sup> Carson, *I Hear What You are Saying*, 75.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>115</sup> Carson, *I Hear What You are Saying*, 76.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>117</sup> Stephen Losey, “Air Force aims to modernize recruiting amid growing challenges,” *Air Force Times*, November 2, 2018, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2018/11/02/air-force-aims-to-modernize-recruiting-amid-growing-challenges/>.

Air Force as a separate service was based on its anticipated future roles, which centered on aviation.<sup>118</sup> As a result, this inadvertently created a “pilot first” informal caste system within the Air Force where there are pilots, and then “everyone else.” Interestingly, there is a competitive caste system even between pilot communities, where identities are often based on platforms.<sup>119</sup> Keep in mind, of the current 321,444 airmen, there are 12,297 pilots from all airframes, meaning pilots comprise only 3.8 percent of the Air Force’s population.<sup>120</sup> In spite of the small pilot population, pilots still represent a majority of Air Force leadership, which reinforces the “pilot primacy” perception. A 2019 RAND study attempted to further explain why pilots tend to lead the Air Force, and it revealed the Air Force cultural belief is based on their “situational awareness and multitasking skills translate to leadership.”<sup>121</sup> This naturally results in more pilots becoming the representations of the Air Force to other services as well as representing Air Force equities to Congress. A disadvantage of this is that when trying to convey various community issues to civilian leadership, it becomes difficult and comes across as outsiders as a service “identity crisis.”<sup>122</sup> Internal to the Air Force, this appears to result in slower recognition of manning issues for non-pilot communities, unless they directly affect flying operations, as seen with maintenance.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Carl H. Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 23.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>120</sup> “Demographics,” United States Air Force, December 31, 2018, accessed November 7, 2018, <https://www.afpc.af.mil/About/Air-Force-Demographics/>.

<sup>121</sup> Rebecca S. Zimmerman et al., *Movement and Maneuver: Culture and the Competition for Influence Among the U.S. Military Services* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2019), 83.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>123</sup> Builder, *The Masks of War*, 26.

While pilot necessity is inarguable, there is a perception of favored treatment and attention for pilots, at the expense of other communities. From the perspective of airmen from non-pilot communities, this Air Force leadership emphasis on pilot service health may not be well received, especially when bonuses offered to some communities are far from equitable.<sup>124</sup> While unquantifiable, this can contribute to animosity when pilots appear overtly favored, for example emphasis on a “fighter pilot crisis” and the disproportionate retention bonuses offered to fighter pilots (discussed in a later section) over other critically manned communities.

### Leadership Sees the Problems, Working on Many Fixes

To the credit of the Secretary Wilson and Gen. Goldfein, efforts are underway to mitigate the problems in this paper which directly impact today and tomorrow’s combat readiness. Many initiatives are long term solutions “works in progress” but demonstrate leadership dedication.

### Recruiting

Due to the smaller recruitment pool for all services, the need to review recruiting practices and standards is understood and ongoing. This change was signaled by Maj Gen. Harencak who said, “We developed obstacles and barriers that great young men and women who wanted to join the US Air Force had to overcome to get in.”<sup>125</sup> When manning drawdowns were occurring, stringent standards were not problematic as they assisted in reducing recruit inflow. Now with the direction to increase Air Force manning, many standards no longer make sense and are being adjusted to increase recruit numbers. Some standards changes are surprising and readdress previously “unthinkable” latitude in areas regarding drug use, tattoos, and medical conditions that were once “no go” items. Besides reconsideration of medical

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<sup>124</sup> Losey, “Ending the pilot exodus.”

<sup>125</sup> Harkins, “How the Military Recruits when 70% of Americans Can’t Serve.”

standards, the Air Force is also finding new ways to target this technologically-inclined younger generation.

Past marijuana use is a polarizing topic that has not been addressed uniformly by recruiters. It was discovered that different recruiters asked various depth level questions on previous drug use to potential recruits, especially in regard to last use. Another question left to recruiter judgement was the number of times in the past marijuana was used. In both cases, lack of Air Force guidance drove leaving it to recruiter discretion. While past use is now acceptable, what has not changed is the position is that once a member joins, marijuana use is no longer permissible, regardless of its legality in their home state. Legal troubles as a result of marijuana use in a state that has not yet legalized marijuana still constitutes enlistment disqualification however.<sup>126</sup>

Another area once restrictive but now relaxed are tattoos. Prior to February 1, 2017, the Air Force held a policy that not more than twenty-five percent of a recruit's exposed body could be tattooed, which focused on the chest, back, arms and legs. As the Air Force seeks talent in the cyber or intelligence career fields, it is recognized that tattoos are more acceptable in society, and therefore regulations must evolve with society. Tattoos that depict gangs, hate groups or other inappropriate messages or depictions are still forbidden; however, in the end, the Air Force hopes loosening this restriction will increase the number of potential recruits.<sup>127</sup>

Medical conditions have also long been a reason recruits were not able to join the Air Force or other services. Some of the major conditions precluding past enlistment included

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<sup>126</sup> Oriana Pawlyk, "Air Force expands Medical Waivers, No Questions on Prior Marijuana Use," *Military.com*, January 10, 2017, accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2017/01/10/air-force-expands-medical-waivers-no-questions-prior-marijuana.html>.

<sup>127</sup> "New Tattoo, recruiting rules are smart moves for the Air Force," *Air Force Times*, January 30, 2017, accessed December 11, 2019, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/162A99C641D84658?p=AFNB>.

eczema, attention deficit/hyperactive disorder (ADHD), some learning disabilities, and asthma. In its review of medical entrance standards, the Air Force has discovered an increase in ADHD for American school aged children, which signaled the need to adapt the policy. Some learning disabilities are also now considerable and like all medical waivers, are considered on a case-by-case basis. Leadership reviewed asthma policies and it became evident some applicants were either misdiagnosed as children or outgrew asthma symptoms. Review of these standards has allowed the Air Force to admit nearly 2,000 airmen with medical waivers, which enabled the Air Force's ability to exceed the 2018 recruitment goal. While there was still a significant number of denials based on condition severity, the Air Force Surgeon General spokeswoman Angelica Lopez stated that "There is not a standard answer for all situations, every applicant with medical condition(s) is evaluated and individually assessed."<sup>128</sup> Speaking from the Air Force level in regards to recruiting standards, General Gina Grosso, as deputy chief of staff for Manpower, has openly questioned whether physical standards need to be the same for a cyber warrior as for someone in a less technical career field.<sup>129</sup> The willingness to even make such a consideration is indicative of the Air Force desire to recruit more of today's technically-savvy generation, and are going about it in ways never seen before.

The first Air Force organization to seek younger talent deliberately is the Air Force Space Command, who is hosting a contest to see who can develop the best satellite tracking software, using video game technology. The short-term goal for this competition, known as the Q-Prize, is to create ways to defend satellites against increasing threats. The reward for the winner is a

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<sup>128</sup> Pawlyk, "Air Force expands Medical Waivers, No Questions on Prior Marijuana Use."

<sup>129</sup> Brian Everstine, "Is uniformity needed for all in uniform?" *Air Force Magazine*, October 13, 2016, accessed December 27, 2018, <http://www.airforcemag.com/DRArchive/Pages/2016/October%202016/October%2013%202016/Is-Uniformity-Needed-for-All-in-Uniform.aspx>.

\$100,000 prize; however, the longer-term goal is to seek deeper inroads into Silicon Valley and Seattle talent pools where top video game programmers have resided for generations.<sup>130</sup> In yet another innovative idea, the Air Force in designing an online video game that allows the public to play an Air Force-designed video game of fun, but allows the Air Force to identify players with the propensity to succeed as an Air Force pilot. While the player's identity will be not accessible to the Air Force, game administrators will be able to send messages to players to encourage them to join, offer educational opportunities, or offer encouragement for the young player to have their parents take them to visit a recruiting office for information on potential careers."<sup>131</sup>

## Returning Whitespace to Airmen

Air Force leadership is fully aware people are also departing due to being overworked but are unable to assess the deterrent effect this condition is having on those considering joining. As the start of a long-time remedy to return white space to airmen, the Air Force is undertaking multiple initiatives to provide the airmen ability to balance their personal and professional lives by maximizing the efficiency of time spent at home station, to preparing to deploy and then deploying. The first target to restoring whitespace is on "queep."

On August 18, 2016, Secretary Wilson and Gen. Goldfein issued a letter regarding "queep," stating their understanding of the growing frustration with additional duties and impact to Air Force primary missions. This letter also acknowledged the unprecedented level of operational demands, as well as how the force was smaller than ever. Strategically, this letter

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<sup>130</sup> Tom Roeder, "Air Force hopes video gamers, YouTubers can protect American satellites," *Military.com*, November 26, 2018, accessed December 10, 2018, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2018/11/26/air-force-hopes-video-gamers-youtubers-can-protect-american-satellites.html>.

<sup>131</sup> Stephen Losey, "New video game 6 to attract recruits - Is this 'The Last starfighter' meets the Air Force?," *Air Force Times*, June 18, 2018, accessed January 27, 2019, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/16C8E11B2D46A320?p=AFNB>.

signified the Air Force commitment to reduce additional taskings to airmen.<sup>132</sup> As a result, the Air Force targeted twenty-nine of the sixty-one additional duties immediately, which included records management, web page maintenance, and assisting others with tax filing. The more significant change was the Air Force enabled commanders to use discretion in determining which duties units should undertake. As an example, not all units required top secret classified access, therefore a commander would no longer have to appoint a top-secret control officer.<sup>133</sup> For additional duties that must be executed regardless of the unit manning, the Air Force is adding 1,600 hundred personnel to fill squadron command support staffs, which do not directly execute the squadron's primary mission, but will accomplish many of the additional duties. This enables combat airmen to focus on primary mission skills and spending time with families.<sup>134</sup>

In continued efforts to alleviate the 2,000-pilot shortage crisis, the Air Force instituted another initiative to reduce strain on airmen in 2018.<sup>135</sup> In May, the Air Force invited retired officers back to duty under the voluntary retired return to active duty (VRRAD) program. The program uses officers to "fill rated staff and active flying staff, test, training and operational positions where rated officer expertise is required."<sup>136</sup> This allows active duty pilots to continue

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<sup>132</sup> "Reducing Additional Duties," US Air Force, accessed December 12, 2018, [https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/SECAF/160816\\_Airmen%27s\\_Time\\_Memo.pdf?ver=2016-08-19-123457-897](https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/SECAF/160816_Airmen%27s_Time_Memo.pdf?ver=2016-08-19-123457-897).

<sup>133</sup> Jennifer H. Svan, "Air Force Slashing Extra Duties so Airmen Can Focus on Mission," *Stars & Stripes*, August 23, 2016, accessed December 20, 2018, <http://lumen.cgsccarl.com/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=n5h&AN=2W63603116707&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>134</sup> Alyssa Gibson, "Air Force proposes 1,600 personnel increase to command support staffs," US Air Force, May 24, 2017, accessed August 20, 2018, the <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1192382/af-proposes-1600-personnel-increase-to-command-support-staffs/>.

<sup>135</sup> Losey, "'We are going to break this force.'"

<sup>136</sup> Kat Bailey, "Retired Air Force rated officers welcomed back on active duty," US Air Force. May 23, 2018, accessed December 3, 2018, <https://www.afpc.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1529307/retired-air-force-rated-officers-welcomed-back-on-active-duty/>.

honing primary mission skills, while balancing family demands. While efforts to improve airmen's lives at home station continue, there was also focus on-deployment preparation and deployments.

## Deployment Preparation and Deployed Tasking Reduction

The training requirements associated with deployment preparation have long been an airman irritant for numerous reasons. As the conceptual value of pre-deployment training is understood, the issues with the training requirements was for reasons such as redundancy with other training, not applicable to the deployment location, or excessive in terms of time to accomplish. Efforts to streamline pre-deployment training including condensing computer-based training requirements or minimizing the number of organizations an airman must visit while out-processing for deployment. Along with visiting various offices is the effort to reduce the wait time at these locations, which is often up to a couple of hours at a time. Another significant effort made was the adjustment of CBT training dates. Here, substantial time was lost by airmen who had to re-accomplish CBT requirements to avoid their expiration during the deployment. Revised guidance now states that as long as the requirement is met at the time of deployment, it is considered valid, giving airmen more time with their families prior to deployment.<sup>137</sup>

In other ongoing efforts to ease the strain of constant deployments for some airmen, Gen. Goldfein ordered the Air Force Central Command (AFCENT) commander, Lieutenant General Jeffrey Harrigian to review the validity of manpower requirements at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar. Gen. Harrigian therefore directed an analysis of the billets and manpower

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<sup>137</sup> Stephen Losey, "Air Force slashes 'queep' paperwork for airmen deploying to Middle East," *Air Force Times*, April 6, 2018, accessed December 14, 2018, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2018/04/06/air-force-slashes-queep-paperwork-for-airmen-deploying-to-middle-east/>.

requirements at Al Udeid to determine what positions were truly necessary as well as to explore if any of the positions could be re-located to AFCENT headquarters at Shaw AFB in South Carolina. Gen. Harrigian's staff determined 125 billets relating to communications, logistics, and mobility could be eliminated or brought back to Shaw AFB. They also identified positions that could be reduced from 365-day deployments to 179-day deployments. Finally, his staff reviewed the expertise criteria for many positions, and increased flexibility in certain staff positions that were previously mandated to a specific career field. This allowed positions to be filled interchangeably from within the rated community versus requiring a specific career field from a specific platform.<sup>138</sup>

A final issue to be addressed regarding deployment manning was ensuring medically qualified airmen are not repeatedly deployed while those with constant medical issues were able to avoid deploying. To resolve this, the Air Force had increased the rigor in medically evaluating airmen who have been non-deployable for over twelve months to determine if/when they will again be deployable. If discovered they will never likely deploy, further discussion occurs to determine if they can be deployed to locations with medical facilities or should be released from service to make room for new airmen medically qualified to deploy. Although not advertised as an automatic separation policy, the intent of this initiative is to restore equity, which has been noted as an irritant for those constantly deploying.<sup>139</sup> As the Air Force continues to find ways to make more airmen available to share the deployment task load, it is also continually looking for ways to keep current airmen in the Air Force.

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<sup>138</sup> Losey, "Air Force takes a hard look at who's deploying."

<sup>139</sup> "Air Force to finalize review process for non-deployable airmen," United States Air Force, October 3, 2018, accessed December 12, 2018, [https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/SECAF/160816\\_Airmen%27s\\_Time\\_Memo.pdf?ver=2016-08-19-123457-897](https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/SECAF/160816_Airmen%27s_Time_Memo.pdf?ver=2016-08-19-123457-897).

## Retaining Airmen

Hopefully by now, this paper has clearly made the point that current Air Force manning is below the required threshold to accomplish all of its key missions due to the lack of available airmen and skill sets in numerous career fields. To resolve this, the Air Force has begun rethinking management of current airmen to bolster numbers in both officer and enlisted ranks.

To increase officer manning, the Air Force announced numerous changes in January 2018. The first change, designed to retain Air Force corporate knowledge, was to allow on a temporary basis, the ability for colonels to remain on active duty for up to three years beyond their mandatory retirement service time. Historically, colonels not selected for brigadier general were required to retire at thirty years of service. This solution was meant to resolve the ongoing condition that one in ten field grade officer jobs for line officers remains unfilled. In the same announcement, the Air Force stated that captains would automatically advance to major, provided they had no adverse action in their records and were recommended for promotion.<sup>140</sup>

In similar efforts to retain enlisted airmen experience, in September 2018, CMSAF Kaleth Wright stated the Air Force is close to finalizing updates to high year tenure restrictions, commonly known as “up or out rules.” The ranks being targeted for retention are construed as those with high level of occupational experience as well as seen as the next generation of NCO leadership. For instance, staff sergeants (SSgts) which are E-5s, are currently required to leave the Air Force after fifteen years if not promoted to technical sergeant. The adjustment would allow SSgts to serve up to twenty years while TSgts would be able to serve up to twenty-two

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<sup>140</sup> Jennifer H. Svan, “Air Force Colonels Nearing Mandatory Retirement Can Remain 3 More Years,” *Stars & Stripes*, January 2, 2018, accessed December 11, 2018, <http://lumen.cgsccarl.com/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=n5h&AN=2W62139520415&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

years vice the previous twenty years.<sup>141</sup> Bolstering officer and enlisted numbers available for missions is one part of the problem; the Air Force is also addressing the resolution for vacancies in key skill sets.

To resolve the approximate 2,000 pilot-gap, the Air Force created an aircrew crisis task force to resolve what senior Air Force leadership characterizes as a “national crisis.” The task force is currently reviewing sixty-nine initiatives which range from incentive pay to increasing squadron health to reduce administrative duties. The three areas the task force is focused on includes retention, production, and requirements. The task force is scheduled to exist for five years although that could change depending on pilot number health within a couple of years.<sup>142</sup> In another initiative, the Air Force has put significant time and money into bonuses to encourage pilots to stay. The Air Force implemented fighter pilot retention bonuses in 2017, then expanded eligibility in 2018 to pilots in some bomber, special operations, mobility, command and control/intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, and search and rescue communities. If they agreed to stay for thirteen additional years, they became eligible for bonuses of up to \$420,000, while fighter pilots were being offered \$455,000.

In other efforts to create the pilot skill set, many options are being discussed. First, there has been continued discussion on revitalizing the warrant officer program. While the decision has not yet been made, other services have spoken of the program’s advantages, largely a warrant officer’s ability to take duties that would free commissioned pilots for

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<sup>141</sup> Stephen Losey, "New rules on high year tenure coming," *Air Force Times*, September 17, 2018, accessed January 23, 2019, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/16E6486A98276150?p=AFNB>.

<sup>142</sup> Amy McCullough, "Aircrew crisis task force gets new leadership," *Air Force Magazine*, July 5, 2018, accessed January 23, 2019, <http://www.airforcemag.com/Features/Pages/2018/July%202018/Aircrew-Crisis-Task-Force-Gets-New-Leadership.aspx>.

command and other high priority tasks. Another advantage was it offers enlisted airmen other career options.<sup>143</sup> Other options already underway was the graduation of the first enlisted remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) pilots on May 5, 2017. This enabled commissioned pilots to continue flying manned aircraft and focusing on command jobs.<sup>144</sup> A briefly-discussed path not chosen by Air Force leadership was the discussion of creating enlisted manned combat aircraft pilots. Although CMSAF Wright indicated enlisted willingness to perform in this role based on the success of RPA pilots and due to the fact that many enlisted members have private pilot licenses, the Air Force is not yet willing to use enlisted aviators in this capacity. They are, however, being used to participate in training tests that will teach the Air Force how to improve training for future pilots.<sup>145</sup> As senior Air Force leadership continues solving the critical skills gap, they are also addressing the promotion system that inadvertently causes the loss of valuable airmen.

## Rethinking Promotion System Paradigms

Recent changes from the DoD regarding promotions have the potential to improve the Air Force ability to stabilize manning numbers. Most of the changes target officers and will allow high-performing officers to be promoted ahead of “traditional schedules” while allowing others to remain in their current rank without the rigid legacy “up or out” consequences. Air Force leadership reaffirms certain aspects of “up or out” rules hold value; however, it should not be a

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<sup>143</sup> Stephen Losey, “New in 2018: will the Air Force bring back warrant officers?,” *Air Force Times*, December 26, 2017, accessed December 12, 2018, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2017/12/26/new-in-2018-will-the-air-force-bring-back-warrant-officers/>.

<sup>144</sup> Stephen Losey, “First enlisted RPA pilots graduate - NCOs make Air Force history; will fly the RQ-4,” *Air Force Times*, May 15, 2017, accessed January 23, 2019, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/16599B791D6D6AB0?p=NewsBank>.

<sup>145</sup> Stephen Losey, “Air Force shoots down enlisted the pilot idea - New pilot program will include 15 officers, 5 enlisted,” *Air Force Times*, December 25, 2017, accessed January 23, 2019, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/1693D7BED8BE7130?p=NewsBank>.

carte blanche policy, especially when managing individuals with crucial skills.<sup>146</sup> The DoD also offered a long overdue promotion system revelation by acknowledging not everyone aspires to be a general or flag officer, which was a large driver to the “up or out” logic. This alone has resulted in much Air Force talent lost due to not being promoted, or not wanting to be promoted.<sup>147</sup>

## Professional Military and Advanced Education

It is universally understood that PME is important to continually developing officers and enlisted airmen into a more refined, lethal force. Much needed reconsideration of these policies has led to a rebalanced approach to enable completion of these courses without sacrificing family time. To reduce duplicate DE accomplishment, several changes for officers were instituted. First, all officers are expected to attend the squadron officer’s school (SOS) in residence, negating the need to complete SOS via DL. This breaks from past direction where SOS was expected to be completed through DL to enable consideration for SOS in residence.<sup>148</sup> Similarly, officers not selected for Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) are allowed to complete ACSC through DL once notified of promotion to major. However, if selected for ACSC in-residence, they were are required to complete the DL to ensure success during in-residence PME.<sup>149</sup> Using similar logic, officers not designated for Air War College (AWC) could enroll in DL once notification of lieutenant colonel promotion selection has occurred. In this case, officers

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<sup>146</sup> Leo Shane III, “Pentagon braces for massive change to officer promotions,” *Air Force Times*, August 20, 2018, accessed January 23, 2019, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/16DCBB69D1448C28?p=AFNB>.

<sup>147</sup> Andrew Tilghman, “Pentagon’s quiet push for military personnel reform,” *Military Times*, May 11, 2015, accessed August 21, 2018, <https://www.militarytimes.com/2015/05/11/pentagon-s-quiet-push-for-military-personnel-reform/>.

<sup>148</sup> Secretary of the Air Force, AFI 36-2301, 2.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

designated for AWC in residence could still accomplish AWC via DL; however, it is not required. For officers who defer in their last year of eligibility, must complete AWC through distance learning.<sup>150</sup> In 2016, another major change was made which has already aided talent retention. In the past, if an officer declined DE, they were expected to separate or retire. This is no longer required; however, airmen are encouraged to complete DL grade.<sup>151</sup>

Enlisted members also saw time saving changes to PME as well. In April 2018, the Air Force stopped requiring noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and senior noncommissioned officers (SNCOs) from needing to accomplish Courses 14 and 15 respectively, which were mandatory academic pre-requisites for the NCO and SNCO academies. Failure to complete these courses rendered members ineligible to attend either academy in residence and therefore this was corrected to increase the white space of NCOs and SNCOs.<sup>152</sup>

Regarding advanced education, the Air Force officially resolved this for officers in 2014 although there is still concern that it is an unexpressed expectation. While not a promotion requirement to major, young officers have still been under the impression it was required, adding stress to many. Upon learning of this, the CSAF at that time, Gen. Mark Welsh, announced a master's degree was not required until competing for colonel.<sup>153</sup> In 2018, the Air Force also changed the requirement for an advanced degree for SNCOs. Prior to this

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Charlsy Panzino, "Air Force officers can now decline developmental education without separating, retiring," *Army Times*, November 7, 2016, accessed December 3, 2018, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-air-force/2016/11/07/air-force-officers-can-now-decline-developmental-education-without-separating-retiring/>.

<sup>152</sup> Stephen Losey, "Air Force scraps Course 14, 15 distance learning requirement for airmen." *Air Force Times*, April 26, 2018, accessed December 17, 2018. <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2018/04/26/air-force-scraps-course-14-15-distance-learning-requirement-for-airmen/>.

<sup>153</sup> Stephen Losey, "Air Force eases officer education requirements," *Air Force Times*, April 21, 2014, accessed December 24, 2018. <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2014/08/22/air-force-eases-officer-education-requirements/>.

announcement, the Air Force required a Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) or associate degree as part of eligibility for promotion to Master Sergeant (MSgt). The Air Force has since lifted this requirement for MSgts but kept this requirement for promotion to senior master sergeant (SMSgt).<sup>154</sup> While these policies were easily enforced due to the binary method of determining adherence, other more complex issues continue to challenge long term Air Force health.

## Fostering an Integrated Workforce

Creating a culture of diversity is foremost on Air Force leadership minds and is expected to be a long-time endeavor. Although far from equitable and certainly not considerable as a victory, gender equality for career opportunities is being addressed by senior Air Force leadership according to a recent RAND report. The Air Force has since modified policies to address issues contributing to lack of retention among female Air Force officers. Unfortunately, much remains to be resolved, which is even more difficult to manage based on a continuously high OPS TEMPO.<sup>155</sup> Encouragingly, trend analysis shows more women being placed in senior leadership positions, however at a slower pace than senior Air Force leadership would hope for.<sup>156</sup> Also improving albeit not quickly enough is acceptance of LGBTQ members.

Colonel Kristin Goodwin was not the first female Air Force Academy commandant; however, she was the first openly gay female commandant. While she was being nominated for the commandant position, she was also nominated for promotion to brigadier general. With

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<sup>154</sup> Kyle Rempfer, "Your Air Force - Air Force cuts CCAF degree requirement," *Air Force Times*, August 06, 2018, accessed January 24, 2019, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/16D86E2D99A24180?p=AFNB>.

<sup>155</sup> Miriam Matthews, "The U.S. Air Force Is Working Harder to Retain Female Officers, and Here's How," RAND (blog), RAND, August 6, 2018, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2018/08/the-us-air-force-is-working-harder-to-retain-female.html>.

<sup>156</sup> Keller et al, *Addressing Barriers to Female Officer Retention*, viii.

impeccable qualifications, her past records included serving as the first female wing commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Wing. In spite of her impeccable pedigree, there was a brief unofficial negative response regarding her past honesty on her sexual orientation. The allegation was she lied about her sexual orientation when she entered the Air Force, which coincided when homosexuality was illegal in the Air Force. This was summarily disregarded by senior Air Force and joint military and civilian leadership.<sup>157</sup> The Air Force has further demonstrated its tolerance in yet another 2018 case which also happened at the Air Force Academy. Cadet Bradley Kim, who was also a football team defensive back, became the first openly gay player at any service academy. In a social media post, he shared his sexual orientation, as well as his passion for football and the Academy. In response, the Academy provided a statement to the Colorado Springs Gazette saying, “The Academy strives to foster a culture where everyone gives and receives dignity and respect so that each individual has the opportunity to fulfill their potential.”<sup>158</sup> A final example that signifies change in the service’s culture also occurred in 2018, where the Air Force attempted to resolve a past wrong. In 1955, airmen second class Helen Grace James was involuntarily separated from the Air Force due to being discovered a lesbian. She was subsequently discharged, having been characterized as “undesirable.” In January 2018 she filed a Federal lawsuit seeking an upgrade to her discharge to “honorable” She was soon

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<sup>157</sup> Oriana Pawlyk, “Group files IG complaint over blog on incoming Academy commandant,” *Military.com*, April 3, 2017, accessed December 30, 2018, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2017/04/03/group-files-ig-complaint-blog-incoming-academy-superintendent.html>.

<sup>158</sup> Jeremy Gottlieb, “Air Force defensive back is 1st openly gay player at a service academy,” *Stars & Stripes*, July 28, 2018, accessed January 3, 2019, <https://www.stripes.com/news/air-force/air-force-defensive-back-is-1st-openly-gay-player-at-a-service-academy-1.540020>.

informed the Air Force Board for Correction of Military Records agreed to change her status as requested, sixty-two years later.<sup>159</sup>

In combating racism, the Air Force has made it clear there will be zero toleration for racist behavior and dealt with swiftly. Gen. Silveria, the former Air Force Academy commandant, demonstrated a perfect response to a racist occurrence that occurred during his tenure.<sup>160</sup> When racially charged graffiti was discovered on the door of an African American cadets dorm room door, Lt Gen Silveria, immediately responded by providing an impromptu speech to cadets, reiterating the Air Force stance on racism, and then closed by inviting anyone who could not live up to those standards to leave. Especially gripping to those witnessing his speech, Lt. Gen. Silveria directed the cadets to pull out their phones and video record his speech so it could be forever documented where he stood on the topic and consequences for participation of racism.<sup>161</sup>

Consistent with that “swift response” mantra to racism, the waitress in St. Louis who had just become an Air Force reserve recruit and was recorded underage drinking while “hunting,” was quickly summoned by Air Force leadership and out-processed from the Reserves within a week of the incident.<sup>162</sup> And, finally, the TSgt who posted racially-toned criticisms of her

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<sup>159</sup> Nicole Bauke, “At 90, lesbian Air Force veteran finally gets her honorable discharge,” *Air Force Times*, January 28, 2018, accessed January 5, 2019, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/2018/01/23/at-90-lesbian-air-force-veteran-finally-get-her-honorable-discharge/>.

<sup>160</sup> Greg Toppo, “Air Force Academy says racial slurs outside dorm rooms were a hoax,” *USA Today*, November 8, 2017, accessed January 19, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2017/11/08/air-force-academy-says-racial-slurs-outside-dorm-rooms-were-hoax/843905001/>.

<sup>161</sup> Toppo, “Air Force Academy says racial slurs outside dorm rooms were a hoax.”

<sup>162</sup> Pawlyk, “Air Force Reserve kicks out recruit after racist video surfaces.”

“disrespectful” African American subordinates, was reduced in rank and reassigned to a new office within two weeks, where she was no longer a supervisor.<sup>163</sup>

Regarding sexual assaults, the Air Force continues to prevent aggressively and as needed, punish those who commit sexual assault. As earlier stated, the number of reported sexual assaults were reported as 1,480 in 2018. The only positive aspect of this report (if it can even be considered such) was that it represented a thirty-four percent reporting increase from the previous year, which was up twenty-six percent from the number of reports in 2015. In general, increased reporting would suggest some level of sexual assault program success due to increased awareness of reporting procedures. While reporting increases may also suggest less hesitation to report crimes, the Air Force is still unsure of how many assaults actually occurred.<sup>164</sup> In these examples, strong senior leadership direction and advanced policies have made headway to cultivating a culture where diversity is valued as part of the cohesive Air Force team. In addition to these changes being made, the Air Force is also committing significant time and resources to improving the quality of life issues that have been reported by many airmen.

## Improving Air Force Family Quality of Life

After studying service exit interviews and analyzing feedback from airmen worldwide, senior Air Force leadership has come to understand that while it cannot provide all needed resources or manning, or reduce the OPS TEMPO on a permanent basis, there are some new policies being enacted that can help airmen and their families achieve improved stability and predictability. Several PCS changes, largely targeting airmen families, are being met with enthusiasm and gratitude. The first major change in 2018 was intended to reduce the hardship felt by the families of airmen selected for 365-day deployments. This allows airmen selected for

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<sup>163</sup> Losey, “Nellis NCO who posted racially charged Facebook rant gets busted down in rank.”

<sup>164</sup> Secretary of the Air Force, *FY 2017 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military*.

365-day deployments to apply for a follow-on assignment prior to departing for deployment, which enables completion of orders to the follow-on assignment up to four months prior to departing for the deployment.<sup>165</sup> This change alone could affect the families of up to 400 airmen a year.<sup>166</sup> The advantage this offers is that it provides families the option of staying at their current location or allows them the ability to move to the follow on location ahead of the deploying airmen, and also reduces the need for the airmen to return to the base that deployed him/her. A final note on the streamlining deployment preparation, senior Air Force leadership has slashed training that is not useful to their deployment location or job or require an extensive time commitment.<sup>167</sup>

To aid in family stability and reduce PCS costs for the government, significant changes to officer assignment cycles occurred in 2018. For the first time, officers transitioned from three to two officer assignment cycles per year. This allows for increased assignment notification and coordination between officers, assignment teams, and commanders. A significant benefit to this is more family reaction time, which is often an irritation to an already traumatic experience.<sup>168</sup> To increase fighter pilot and weapons systems officer retention as a result of frequency moves, Air Force unveiled a “second assignment in place” pilot program. This targets aircrew members

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<sup>165</sup> Brian Ferguson, “Air Force allows families to leave for new assignment while airmen are on extended deployments,” *Stars & Stripes*, November 14, 2018, accessed December 5, 2018, <https://www.stripes.com/news/air-force-allows-families-to-leave-for-new-assignment-while-airmen-are-on-extended-deployments-1.556563>.

<sup>166</sup> Stephen Losey, “365-day deployers get to pick next station early,” *Air Force Times*, December 03, 2018, accessed January 25, 2019, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/resources/doc/nb/news/17025434E5C407A0?p=NewsBank>.

<sup>167</sup> John A. Ausink et al, *Managing Air Force Joint Expeditionary taskings*,” 36.

<sup>168</sup> Stephen Losey, “Air Force officer assignments move from three cycles to two,” *Air Force Times*, March 2, 2018, accessed January 24, 2019, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2018/03/02/air-force-officer-assignments-move-from-three-cycles-to-two/>.

with specific instructor or evaluator backgrounds. While not widely available to the Air Force as of yet, its existence shows Air Force awareness of the needs to reduce stress to families.<sup>169</sup>

Regarding base pay compensation, the DoD recognizes it must identify service members requiring financial assistance. After questioning from senior civilian leadership, it was apparent the services lack understanding of how many of their service members struggle to “make ends meet.” Therefore, the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act now requires the Pentagon to determine and report how many servicemembers rely on additional assistance to feed their families and the Air Force is struggling to determine those in need.<sup>170</sup>

Tremendous effort has been placed in improving quality of life for airmen and families. The question remains: will it be enough to keep airmen in or make new ones want to join?

## Conclusion

### Areas for Further Research

As the pool of eligible future airmen shrinks, the talent demand for current and future missions is growing as US adversaries increase their combat capability. At the same time, senior Air Force leadership is still trying to understand the current generation’s motivations to join the Air Force. What is known is unit readiness, cultural considerations, embracing diversity, understanding post-millennials, family and personal satisfaction, financial considerations, and streamlining operational practices, all influence recruiting and retention. As Air Force leadership readies the Air Force for the future, there are areas requiring continued work and/or research.

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<sup>169</sup> Stephen Losey, “To keep pilots from quitting, the Air Force will let some stay in assignments longer.” *Air Force Times*, September 7, 2017, accessed November 10, 2018, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2017/09/07/to-keep-pilots-from-quitting-the-air-force-will-let-some-stay-in-assignments-longer/>.

<sup>170</sup> Grisales, “Lawmakers push for military access to food assistance program.”.

## Reflecting readiness to the Joint Staff

Tools such as the Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS) and Status of Resources and Training System (SORTS) are the primary means used by squadron leadership to reflect unit health and combat readiness. While it depicts fighter squadron readiness well, it is not optimal for non-flying units or multi-place, multi Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) platforms and requires manipulation to “tell the story.” Updated methods of depicting readiness to Air Force senior leadership enables them to advocate for resources and manpower more precisely, which is critical to helping today’s airmen who struggle to make the mission happen daily.

## Continuing fostering an all-inclusive Air Force culture

By virtue of being the Air Force, pilots are central to operations. Unfortunately, scar tissue has been accrued by non-pilot airmen who are inadvertently led to believe the “pilot crisis” is the end all-be all. Consideration for greater equality in retention bonuses for other career fields may be a possible first step, but more importantly, careful messaging to prevent their minimization is crucial. Also, in non-pilot career fields, there are often factors that explain issues that are not easily apparent. Therefore, it is worth consideration of doing “deep dives,” known as cultural process improvement plans (CPIPs), on several critically manned career fields to gain a better understanding of issues that can be corrected for that specific career field to ultimately aid in retention.

## Embracing Diversity

The Air Force has performed remarkably in fostering diversity, although this is clearly a long path to achieving gender equality, ensuring freedom of religion, and ensuring integration of LGBTQ airmen. Although currently banned, the Air Force may start considering policies for transgender airmen, based on the likelihood of reversal of the current policy. As discussed earlier, millennials and post millennials are generally more accepting of diversity and may not be

inclined to join organizations perceived as “intolerant.” While numbers or figures cannot yet quantify the impacts of perceived intolerance, it is a known factor and will continue to be so in the future.

### Learning to understand and lead post-millennial airmen

As the Air Force becomes more populated with post millennials, efforts should be made to evolve leadership and instruction methods. As the nation studies different cultures in the world, the youth of the U.S. should be studied to enable better leadership and mentorship. As Gen Xers and millennials continue leading in the Air Force, an understanding of different values and motivations between generations must always be in mind to avoid judging new airmen incorrectly, who are imperative to the future of the Air Force. Finally, in efforts to reverse the trend of military families being less inclined to recommend the service as a career, the Air Force may consider following the USMC’s lead in placing recruiting stations at overseas duty locations to encourage military children a chance to consider following in their parent’s footsteps.<sup>171</sup>

### Family and personal satisfaction

Quantifying family satisfaction is already difficult; however, this becomes slightly more difficult when trying to assess the satisfaction of both officer and enlisted families. From an officer perspective, 2018 saw the exodus of at least 600 colonels, far beyond anticipated annual attrition. The reasons driving this significant loss of experience should be evaluated for future use if not already accomplished. From an enlisted perspective, there appears to be little available data on family satisfaction. This begs the question, are enlisted members staying because they are truly happy or because they are financially unable to leave? Another lacking data point is divorce rates in the Air Force for both officer and enlisted, specifically to draw

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<sup>171</sup> “Military must adapt to avoid a recruiting crisis,” *Air Force Times*.

conclusions if the OPS TEMPO is a factor. Finally, more research should either be accomplished or released regarding the current suicide rate to determine correlations to unfavorable factors in the Air Force.

### Financial Considerations

While the Air Force has input into retention bonus allocations, the DoD may consider review of military pay tables that are not favorable to entrance level recruits. While military budgets can hardly afford increased expenditures, ensuring future airmen are never below the poverty level is critical to the “take care of the Air Force family” culture the Air Force seeks. This will require ceaseless advocacy, with sister service support, at the congressional level to achieve traction. There are also no indications that a pay wage analysis between officers and enlisted members has occurred at any time in recent history. Regarding retirement compensation, continued research should be focused on the success of the BRS, or more precisely if it will entice airmen to stay or whether it is making it easier to get out before completing twenty years. Perhaps the bigger question is, does the Air Force truly want more airmen to stay in for at least twenty years?

### Reviewing and Eradicating Inefficient Practices

Based on newly-instituted initiatives, it appears Air Force senior leadership is acutely aware of the minimal time available for available to today’s airmen. As the OPS TEMPO is not projected to decrease at any point in the near future, the Air Force must continue looking for areas to reduce airmen workload. This includes continued reduction of additional duties, as well as reconsideration of awards and promotion criteria. There appears to still be disconnects in promotions and awards that require accomplishment of certain items to be competitive, which may not be possible for airmen in high OPS TEMPO units. If they are accomplished to achieve competitiveness, it is coming at the expense of an airmen’s ability to improve at their primary

job, take care of the Air Force family in terms of mentorship and hands on supervision, and most importantly, take care of their own families.

## Final Thoughts

This paper discussed a wide range of factors that are integral parts of a precarious equation that will ultimately decide if the youth the Air Force hopes to attract from society will be inclined to commit to an Air Force career, or, in the near term if those already serving will stay. While the factors are both imposed on the Air Force from outside sources or are caused as a result of senior Air Force leadership legislation, they will be the “make or break” factors that determine the future of the Air Force. The reality is that the days of manning and resource excesses are gone for good, and therefore, it is imperative that leadership at all levels in the Air Force continue providing the best advice possible to senior Air Force leadership, while doing so ensures all airmen, regardless of their backgrounds or personal stories, have the ability to flourish in the Air Force as if the future of the Air Force depends on it. In reality, it does.

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