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Recruiting and Retention in the Air National Guard

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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AUTHOR: MAJOR T. R. COX

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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Francis H. Marlo
Approved: [Signature]
Date: 3/29/18
Oral Defense Committee Member: McMELLOS, MICHAEL A.
Approved: [Signature]
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Executive Summary

Title: ANG Fighter Pilots: Recruiting, Retaining

Author: Major T. R. COX, USAF

Thesis: The ANG must do a better job of recruiting and retaining fighter pilots by establishing better processes and procedures recruiting new fighter pilots from both civilian and military sectors, and by actively addressing and nullifying the detractors of retaining fighter pilots in ANG.

Discussion. The ANG does not have enough fighter pilots, and more are leaving every day. With fighter pilot inventories decreasing, the ANG needs to work on recruiting, and retention to keeping its manning documents full and its missions accomplished. The USAF has been in a steady state of cost savings and downsizing for the last twenty-eight years. The ANG has felt the repercussions of the downsizing in all areas. With the rapidly growing airline industry and lack of fighter squadrons in the USAF, the ANG needs to spend more attention ensuring all ANG fighter squadrons are manned and equipped to defend the nation abroad and at home. This analysis examines the current and forecasted manning situations, the causal factors associated with the manning deficiencies, and provides a series of recommendations for recruiting and retaining fighter pilots more successfully for the ANG.

Conclusion: This paper provides several recommendations on how to better fill ANG fighter squadrons with pilots. First, the ANG must recruit better and more capable pilots from the civilian sector, do a better job of in-service recruiting, and put more effort into recruiting from the sister services. Second, the ANG must improve pilot retention by decreasing operations tempo, increasing support functions, providing more accessible occupational health care, creating a more flexible and effective pay and incentive system, changing promotion requirements, and creating more flexible employment options for drill status guardsmen.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACA – Aerospace Control Alert

AD – Active Duty

ADSC – Active Duty Service Commitment

AETC – Air Education and Training Command

AFRC – Air Force Reserve Command

AGR – Active Guard Reserve

ANG – Air National Guard

AvB – Aviation Retention Bonus

B-Course – Basic course

CSS – Commanders Support Staff

DNIF – Duty Not Including Flight

DSG – Drill Status Guardsmen

GWOT – Global War on Terrorism

HAF – Headquarters Air Force

HOR – Home of Record

IDE – Intermediate Developmental Education

Lt Col – Lieutenant Colonel

SECAF – Secretary of Air Force

TX – Transition Course

USAF – United States Air Force

USMC – United States Marine Corps

USN – United States Navy

USERRA – Uniformed Service Employment and Reemployment Rights Act

UPT – Undergraduate Pilot Training

VRRAD - Voluntary Retired Return to Active Duty

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INTRODUCTION

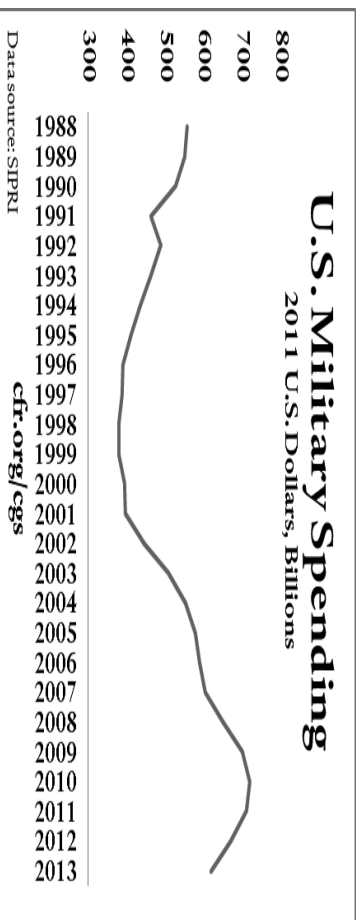
The United States Air Force (USAF) and the Air National Guard (ANG) are in a dire manning situation. The number of pilots that they can produce does not come close to the number of pilots that they lose from the force every year.¹ Furthermore, the arguably most talented and most difficult to train of those, fighter pilots, are leaving the force at unprecedented rates.² More specifically within the ANG (the nation's reserve force), there is even an even direr manning crisis that leaders must confront to continue to provide the nation's air defense services the support required by current national defense policies.³ There have been many research articles written by students and professionals looking for new and inventive ways to stop the exit of pilots from the service. The RAND Corporation has conducted many studies looking to solve the exodus. In addition to RAND's articles, many PME students and other military professionals have attempted to address the multibillion-dollar problem that the active duty (AD) USAF is facing.⁴ To sum up the results of those papers, there is, in fact, a USAF pilot shortage, and the deficit is growing.⁵ Ideas on how to fix the problem are wide-ranging, from giving pilots more money to collaborating with the major air carriers to help the AD USAF maintain its force while helping to repair the manning problem that the airlines are currently facing.⁶ While there have been many studies commissioned to fix the pilot shortage problem in the AD USAF, the ANG, which makes up a nearly one-third of the USAF's fighter force, has mostly been ignored.⁷ There have been few if any research papers aimed at fixing the ANG problem. This paper will highlight the main manning issues facing ANG, how to solve the manning problem from the ANG's perspective, and what steps must be taken to address the manning shortage head on and quell the mass exodus from the nation's Air

Defense Force. The ANG must do a better job of recruiting and retaining fighter pilots by establishing better processes and procedures recruiting new fighter pilots from both civilian and military sectors, and by actively addressing and nullifying the detractors of retaining fighter pilots in ANG.

Historical Context

The USAF as a whole is undermanned with pilots, especially fighter pilots. Currently, the USAF estimates that it is 1,600 pilots short, of which over 1,000 are fighter pilots.⁸ The ANG is undermanned by sixteen percent fighter pilots, with 150 of 900 fighter pilot positions open.⁹ The manning situation within the ANG is bad and expected to get worse within the next five to ten years.¹⁰ This lack of pilots did not occur overnight: it has been a long and drawn out process that has been happening since the end of the Cold War.

After the end of the Cold War, the USAF drew down in size and strength.¹¹ This drawdown was partly due to the loss of a clearly-defined enemy. Additionally, the high financial cost of Cold War and high defense spending became a budget item that the American people were willing to reduce. As seen in figure 1, the nation began to decrease defense spending throughout the last decade of the twentieth century.



Source: Dinal Walker, *Trends in Military Defense Spending*, www.cfrs.org/cgs, Jul 2015

The decision to reduce the force and decrease spending was a rational step to reallocate funding in an era with an apparent lack of threats to national security. Then on September 11, 2001, that assessment changed with the falling of the Twin Towers and the entrance of the country into the most protracted war in its history. The Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) has spanned more than sixteen years and cost the US more than three trillion dollars.¹² The result in the USAF has been a series of cost-cutting measures implemented to preserve resources to help fund the GWOT. The downside to cost-cutting is that the Air Force has been putting off sustainment and upgrades, reducing the number of people serving, shrinking the force, and ignoring the needs of tomorrow. The USAF is broken and is on the brink of failure due to pilot manning shortages. Major General Scott West, Director of Current Operations, Headquarters U.S. Air Force says that the Air Force fleet is the “smallest, oldest and least ready forces across the full spectrum of operations in our history.”¹³ The reduction in the size of the fleet and the lack of sustainment and procurement dollars has created the vast increase in operational use and a fleet that is falling apart. The ANG as a portion of the USAF has not been immune to the reductions of people, logistics, sustainment, and upgrades. The cost-cutting measures in the ANG and the fact that airlines are hiring at higher than historical

rates have created a manning crisis that the nation must address to meet its national defense requirements.

The ANG is a critical part of the nation's defenses, serving both as the first line of defense in the Aerospace Control Alert (ACA), as well as filling substantial roles in the training and operational fleets throughout the world.¹⁴ The ANG can attribute its manning problems to multiple factors. First, the airline industry is hiring at unprecedented rates.¹⁵ Second, the operations tempo has been much higher than historical averages due to GWOT and the lack of operational fighter squadrons.¹⁶ Third, the reduction in the size of the USAF has created a hollow force that is requiring the fighter pilot to accomplish additional duties outside of the warfighting function of aerial combat.¹⁷ Lastly, the lack of sustainment and upgrades have left the fighter fleet broken to the point where fighter pilots aren't getting as many flight hours or training as they have in the past.¹⁸ All of these factors have created a situation where the ANG can no longer ignore the growing problem. The ANG must act now to maintain and to build its fighter pilot force to levels that are acceptable to accomplish all of its assigned missions. The first area that the ANG must improve on is recruiting.

RECRUITING

Currently, most ANG pilots begin their career in the AD.¹⁹ The ANG pilot training pipeline is not designed to and cannot support producing the number of pilots required to fill all of its requirements from within the ANG. Because of the lack of production capability in the ANG, it relies on the AD to produce the bulk of the pilots and then looks to bring them into the ANG after their Active Duty Service Commitment (ADSC) is complete. With the fighter pilot shortage that is present in the AD and the

ANG, the USAF as a whole needs to collaborate to more efficiently recruit pilots. As the lead branch of the service, the AD has a vested interest in the ANG shortage because the ANG is filling more of the ACA and deployment rotation for the AD than ever before.²⁰ The USAF needs to promote ANG recruiting on par with AD recruiting. Currently, in the USAF there is a training capacity issue that is restricting the number of pilots that can be trained. The USAF, therefore, would be better served to promote ANG recruiting at the termination of the ADSC rather than drastically increasing the number of ANG pilots being trained at Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT). By addressing the problem within the ANG, the USAF will be healthier manning wise and will be better able to fulfill its national defense role. There are multiple ways to better recruit towards the ANG. Three ways to improve ANG fighter pilot recruiting include Home of Record (*HOR*)-Based *Airframe Selection in UPT*, an improved and standardized process of *Recruiting New Pilots*, and better *In-Service and Sister Service Recruiting*.

HOR-Based Airframe Selection in UPT

Currently, every USAF pilot incurs a ten-year commitment to the USAF when they graduate pilot training. This commitment is a payback to the USAF for the millions of dollars' worth of training the individual pilot receives.²¹ After the pilot completes the ADSC to the USAF, each pilot chooses whether to continue to serve or to leave the service, based on a myriad of factors. A significant portion of fighter pilots who exit the AD after their initial commitment then goes on to associate with one of the two reserve components. A recent study shows that up to sixty percent of pilots who are leaving the AD are affiliating with either the ANG or the Air Force Reserve Component.²² The ANG needs to increase this percentage with some new strategies.²³ Most ANG pilots have chosen to leave AD to pursue other interests or to prioritize other things in their life, such

as family.²⁴ One way to increase the reserve component affiliation is HOR-based airframe selection in UPT. The ANG has always leveraged the thought that it represents the “hometown” Air Force and gives pilots the opportunity to settle down in one place and raise a family. In the past, the idea of the “hometown” Air Force has been a big draw to the ANG and has filled its ranks with some of the best AD pilots. With the USAF operating in a total force construct where all three branches share the burden of operational deployments, the USAF could bolster its recruiting percentages by HOR-based airframe selection in UPT.²⁵

If the program were enacted, the USAF would place new AD pilots into the type of aircraft that correlates with ANG units near the pilots HOR. Most fighter pilots quote family needs as one of the most important reasons to separate from the military.²⁶ Thus, being closer to family and still having the opportunity to fly and serve the nation would potentially increase the recruiting potential of the ANG. By matching new pilots from UPT students with airframes geographically located near ANG units near the pilot’s HOR would increase the probability that the fighter pilot would continue to serve after his ADSC. Pushing HOR-based airframe selection would increase the percentage of pilots who affiliate with the reserve component after separation and reduce the manning crisis in the ANG. Although this policy may draw a few more pilots to the ANG from the AD, HOR-based airframe selection would also benefit the AD by reducing retraining, saving money, and opening training capacity for new AD pilots. This metric would be an additional selection variable that UPT commanders can utilize to place pilots in airframes. By doing so, when that fighter pilot decides to exit the AD at the end of his ADSC, it makes an easy decision and a very smooth transition to the ANG.

As stated above, HOR-based airframe selection at UPT would also help the AD by decreasing retraining requirements for pilots who are affiliating with the reserves. By placing new AD pilots in airframes that have ANG units in close geographic proximity, the USAF would decrease the number of transition courses (TX) required and in turn could contribute more basic courses (B-courses) to new AD pilots. The reduction of TX courses would result from more pilots not having to switch airframes when transferring to the ANG. Currently, training capacity is one of the major limiting factors that the USAF is facing while trying to remedy the manning and retention problem. If more of the pilots who separate do not require retraining to a new aircraft, it would drastically reduce the amount of training capacity that is being used up by retraining pilots to different airframes and open more capacity for new pilots.

Placing new AD fighter pilots in airframes located near their HOR's would increase retention, save money, open more capacity, and have vast impacts on the recruiting potential of the ANG and the USAF as a whole. In a time when training capacity is at a premium because of the lack of sustainment and investment in training platforms, every training course matters and every cockpit needs to be filled with new fighter pilots, and not wasted on retraining experienced ones because they are learning to fly a new airframe.

Recruiting New Pilots

In addition to optimizing the HOR-based airframe selection at UPT, the ANG must also increase recruitment through organic means. Every year, all of the ninety ANG Wings can select individuals from the civilian sector or from within their ranks to fill UPT slots. Historically, the program has been a critical piece of the pilot manning for the

ANG. Typically, these candidates are college graduates who have either enlisted in the military or have no military experience and have chosen to become a pilot. Currently, the process is long and cumbersome. The process takes many years to get a qualified pilot out of the training pipeline.²⁷ The ANG must take on a more proactive role in recruiting more, better-qualified candidates and also do a better job of streamlining the process to ensure each fighter unit has a ready supply of new fighter pilots to fill its ranks. To select more, the Headquarters ANG needs to release more UPT slots to the wings throughout the ANG. Each unit commander must also proactively request more slots to produce more potential fighter pilots for the training pipeline. Choosing more UPT candidates would be an arduous task that is time-consuming and doesn't always provide returns. Historically, the likelihood of ANG fighter pilot trainees completing the required training for fighter pilots is lower than that of the AD. The higher failure rates are attributed to the fact that ANG fighter pilot trainees are selected before UPT attendance, whereas AD fighter pilot students' selection occurs after they have demonstrated the required skills to complete advanced fighter training programs. Although the selection of more candidates is time-consuming and the sometimes fruitless it must be undertaken to increase the number of fighter pilots in the ANG.

The UPT selection process is further complicated because each unit does its own recruiting and hiring into the organization. Each unit does its process differently and has different selection criteria for its candidates. The upside of doing recruiting this way is that it allows unit commanders to keep tight control on the quality and personalities accepted into the unit. The unit commander hires the "right person" for the unit, keeping the unit integrity high and the culture healthy. The individual unit selection also has a

downside. Each unit sets its selection criteria which have created less than optimal success rates, with higher failure rates among the pilot candidates from some specific units.²⁸ Trainee failures have ripple effects throughout the organization's manning. When one pilot candidate is unable to complete training, there is no way to get someone else into his or her slot because of the complexity and length of the selection and placement process. The result of the fighter pilot trainee failure is a manning gap that takes years to replace. Criteria need to change in the selection and training process to retain the personal nature, but also create a more uniform and efficient system to replace trainees if one is struggling in the course.

Establishing a more robust and standard set of parameters that each unit would use to select its pilot candidates would create more stability in the selection process and lower failure rates. The standard set of selection parameters would help to identify which traits of prospective candidates translate into success in UPT. Applying the metrics would allow the ANG units to lower failure rates and lessen the manning crisis. By establishing a standard set of selection parameters but still allowing local commanders the final selection choices, the ANG would give commanders the control to choose the individuals who get hired while still ensuring they get the most qualified applicants. In addition to creating standard selection parameters, the ANG needs to create a more accessible list of candidates that are in the training process.

By creating the common accessible list, the ANG would form a quick reaction contact list of pilot trainees that could move into a position opened by the failure of a fighter pilot trainee. ANG fighter students have specific performance objectives that they must meet in order continue in the fighter training track. Currently, if an ANG fighter

pilot trainee struggles and doesn't achieve performance objectives, the student will continue to train to become a pilot, but the student will not be allowed to remain in the fighter training track. Once notification of the failure to meet standards goes to the home unit, they typically will look to move the pilot trainee to either the mobility or bomber training track.¹ The pilot trainee is usually delayed slightly in training, but the trainee will continue on to graduate from UPT. If the ANG created a standard list that commanders can access, the first sign of struggle or failure from a student pilot would prompt action that would place students who are excelling in fighter aircraft slots. The common list would allow the commander to start the process of finding a suitable replacement and still stay on or close to the training timeline and thus not create the manning gap associated with a UPT failure. Fixing the new pilot selection problems would have a dramatic and positive effect on unit manning and help to fix deficits within the ANG. There is still another area where the ANG needs to focus its efforts to boost recruiting.

In-Service and Sister Service Recruiting

There are a few other significant fighter pilot resources in the United States military that the ANG must exploit. Pilots who fly different fighter airframes in the AD or who fly for the sister services, are not well represented in the ANG. The low percentage of other airframe recruits necessitate that ANG leadership spend more time, energy, and effort recruiting them. The ANG does not have all of the same airframes that the AD or the other services have. The lack of common airframes often leads the ANG to

¹ The USAF has different training performance training objectives for Fighter, Bomber, and Mobility aircraft.

overlook large populations of talented and qualified fighter pilots. The lack of recruiting in other airframes exists because there is a lack of communication between commanders in the ANG and AD, or sister service fighter pilots that do not have ANG airframe representation. Although there would be some retraining required, the expertise and skills that experienced fighter pilots possess transfer easily between airframes, and the cost of retraining an experienced fighter pilot is a fraction of the cost required for training a new fighter pilot. The ANG needs to create a system that provides names and qualifications of individual fighter pilots that are approaching the end of their ADSC and have chosen to separate from active service. The system would provide commanders access to the pilots who are looking to end their AD service and may not know all the options that are available to them in the ANG. Boosting the recruiting efforts to fighter pilots who do not have an ANG unit flying their airframe could produce significant recruiting results.

Furthermore, the ANG needs to contact the sister services of the United States Navy (USN), and the United States Marine Corps (USMC) and again look build a comprehensive database on fighter pilots within the force who are approaching the end of their ADSC and who have chosen to separate. Historically, upwards of forty percent of USN fighter pilots do not remain for twenty years of service; this represents a massive opportunity for the ANG.²⁹ The sister services are not well represented within in the ANG, with most of the recruiting coming by way of word of mouth.³⁰ The ANG must capitalize on the fighter pilots within the sister services to fully realize the recruiting potential that the AD, USN, and USMC can provide for ANG manning.

Recruiting to the ANG needs to improve to help fix the manning crisis that is taking place. The ANG can make strides in the right direction by pushing HOR-based airframe selection, standardizing UPT selection processes, a common recruiting database, and in-service and sister service recruiting. Recruiting, although very important to the ANG for manning, is second in importance to retaining the pilots that are currently serving.

RETENTION

Retention is the most significant problem that the ANG is facing. Once trained, a fighter pilot is a valuable resource for the USAF, and their retention in the USAF requires better management. It takes the United States military many years, and millions of dollars, to replace fighter pilots once they decide to leave the force.³¹ Those facts alone make it imperative for leaders at all levels throughout the ANG to answer the pressing question of how to slow or stop the exodus of fighter pilots from the ranks of the ANG.

The AD, as the lead branch of the USAF, has put research, dollars, and creativity into solving its retention problem. Ideas that have come out of the Headquarters Air Force (HAF) training branch include Voluntary Retired Return to Active Duty (VRRAD), reduction of deployment requirements for fighter pilots, reduction of additional duties, and increasing bonuses.³² The AD has addressed some long overdue ideas but more work is needed, and solutions implementation must happen faster. The retention problem in the ANG is also wide-ranging and systemic. All USAF pilots have a service commitment of ten years after the completion of UPT. This commitment is a payback to the USAF for the six million plus dollars' worth of training that the USAF has invested per pilot.³³ As mentioned above, only about sixty percent of pilots who leave

after their ADSC affiliate with the ANG or the AFRC.³⁴ The post-ADSC affiliation number represents a significant loss for the USAF every year, but it also represents a tremendous opportunity to improve retention. After getting the recruiting percentages up, there is still another problem, keeping ANG fighter pilots serving until they reach retirement age. In general, fighter pilots are not leaving the ANG because they lack the desire to serve the nation. Nor are fighter pilots leaving because they no longer want to fly. On the contrary, flying is what keeps fighter pilots in the ANG. Instead, what keeps fighter pilots from staying in the ANG are all of the other distractors that prevent them from flying. The ANG must work to retain more of its fighter pilots through, decreasing *Operations Tempo*, increase *Support Personnel*, providing better *Health Care*, increasing *Pay and Incentives*, changing *Promotion Requirements*, and taking care of *Drill Status Guardsmen (DSG)*.

As stated in the introduction, this problem began before most of the fighter pilots who are currently serving entered the service. After the fall of the Soviet Union, drastic changes to the United States military, and specifically the fighter fleet, have taken place. In 1989, there were 134 fighter squadrons in the USAF, currently, there are fifty-five.³⁵ Coupled together with the drastic reduction in fighter squadrons, operations tempo has increased and constant for the last sixteen years.³⁶ The lack of fighter squadrons has put more of the deployment burden on the ANG. Increased operations tempo does mean more flying while deployed, which is good in some ways, but it also means that fighter pilots are deployed more often and for more extended periods. In addition to the higher deployment rates, the ANG over the last twenty years has lacked in sustainment and upgrade of aircraft.³⁷ The resulting lack of sustainment and upgrade of aircraft has

created a situation where airplanes are breaking at higher rates than they ever have.³⁸ The increase in break rates, lack of parts, and lack of maintainers create a situation that is limiting flying hours for pilots. In addition to the lack of maintenance personnel throughout the entirety of the fighter wings, there is a lack of support personnel. The lack of support personnel requires fighter pilots who would prefer to be flying, burdened with additional duties outside their primary duty function. On top of extra support function reductions, the general perception of fighter pilots is that ancillary training increases every successive year taking more time away from them focusing on their primary mission.

Operations Tempo

Operations tempo is pushing fighter pilots away from continuing to serve in the ANG. Currently, the ANG is operating at a higher operations tempo than it has historically.³⁹ Factors influencing the higher operations tempo, including smaller force size, reduction of fighter squadrons across the USAF, sixteen years of constant operations in the Middle East, and the increase of operations tempo in the European AOR, all have hurt retention. The ANG would like to have its units on a one to five deploy-to-dwell ratio, but over the past ten years units have been exceeding that mark.⁴⁰ For many fighter pilots who have gotten out of the AD to slow down and focus more on their family, the increased operations tempo of the ANG is not what they expected. Family and life outside of the cockpit begin to become a much higher priority when the fighter pilot has a spouse and kids. Deploying starts to lose its appeal, especially at rates that are on par with their AD counterparts.

The USAF and ANG must continue to invest in the adding more fighter squadrons to the fleet or reduce the number of deployment requirements leveraged on the ANG. If the USAF were to reactivate a portion of the previously deactivated fighter squadrons that have closed over the last twenty years, it would lessen the deployment burden on the current force and accomplish the one to five deploy-to-dwell ratio that the director of the Air National Guard desires.⁴¹ The other option to reduce operations tempo is to decrease the foreign deployment requirements around the world, which seems unlikely with the current National Defense Strategy.

Support Personnel

In addition to higher operations rates, the decrease of support manning and increase in ancillary training also pulls fighter pilots away from their primary duty.⁴² Because of these additional duties, pilots must accomplish their primary mission during regular work hours and come in before or stay after work to perform additional duties that keep the fighter squadron running.

In accordance with the Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF) and the Secretary of the Air Force (SECAF) memo in August of 2016, the USAF needs to revitalize the Commander Support Staff (CSS) within the fighter squadrons.⁴³ By bolstering the CSS in fighter squadrons, the ANG would reduce the additional duty requirements levied on the fighter pilots within the squadron. The ANG must also look to reduce or modify the hours of repetitive ancillary training with which USAF wastes pilots' time. The computer-based training is cumbersome and causes the user to pay less attention and just gloss through the needed lesson. The USAF needs to allow commanders to command and will enable them to examine the entire ancillary program and ensure all required

training programs are necessary. After deeming that the training is required, a competent and qualified unit member needs to brief all squadron members in person to ensure the training is practical. The hands-on training will not only take less time but also guarantee the receipt of crucial programs, and that the programs that are not important do not take up valuable time.

Healthcare

For the ANG, the health of the bodies of its pilots also starts to become an issue, unlike the AD which has a constant supply of twenty-three-year-old to twenty-five-year-old new fighter pilots who continuously rotate into the fighter squadron. ANG pilots are typically older when they begin flying for the ANG and fly for longer than the typical AD pilot.⁴⁴ The physical abuse starts to add up. At any given time in ANG fighter squadrons, there are a handful of pilots who are in some type of duty not including flight (DNIF) status.⁴⁵ In the AD, just by the nature of the assignment process, most pilots do not spend more than six years at a time in a fighter aircraft. In the ANG it is not uncommon for fighter pilots to fly for their entire twenty-year career with no breaks. Flying fighter aircraft is a physically demanding occupation with real and long-lasting consequences.⁴⁶ Those consequences range from neck, and back issues that require physical therapy to correct, to more severe consequences that result in surgery or permanent disability. Currently, there are insufficient resources on ANG bases that a fighter pilot can access in the way of professional medical care.⁴⁷ The lack of care results from the typically part-time nature of medical professionals within the ANG. The effect of inadequate medical care is a pilot cadre that is prone to permanent neck and back injuries that lead to long-term or even permanent DNIF status for ANG pilots. In turn,

once a pilot has an injury, the pilot can no longer support the mission and often leave the force to pursue other career opportunities.

The ANG needs to invest in better health care for its aviators. The cost of having a part-time physical therapist, exercise physiologist, or chiropractor available would pale in comparison to the amount of money lost every year due to pilots being unable to accomplish their primary duty, flying.⁴⁸ The ANG needs to place medical professionals at all its fighter squadrons. Free and accessible health care resources would significantly increase fly rates of pilots, decrease DNIF periods, and reduce the amount of time aviators spent away from the squadron at medical professionals outside of the military not accomplishing their primary mission of flying.

Pay and Incentives

The pay and incentives of the USAF have not kept up with the civilian sector. US airline pilots make far more money than USAF fighter pilots.² US airline pilots make over 170 thousand dollars per year on average as compared to the average twelve-year captain in the ANG making 109 thousand per year.⁴⁹ The airline industry is hiring at higher rates than have been seen in decades.⁵⁰ The relationship between the rate of growth in the airline industry and the lower retention rates cannot be overstated. Historically, when the U.S. economy is healthy and growing, the demand for airline pilots increases, and it directly affects retention of pilots in the USAF.⁵¹ The airline industry offers better pay and requires less time than working for the ANG.⁵² The USAF has been reactive to the changing pay rates in the civilian sector by increasing Aviation Retention Bonuses (AvB) and increasing the flight pay that senior pilots receive each month, but

² ANG salary based on an AGR captain on the 2017 pay scale and the pilot is not receiving AvB.

they are still behind in both amount and scope of financial incentives. For an ANG fighter pilot to obtain the AvB, the pilot must commit to remain in the ANG in an Active Guard Reserve (AGR) status for a minimum of four years.⁵³ The restrictions in the AvB program are extensive, and AvB is not offered to part-time pilots or full-time pilots who are serving in federal technician status.³ Even with the improvements to the pay and benefits, the ANG needs to do more to incentivize its fighter pilots not to leave.

Currently, the AvB is not large enough and only covers AGR's. The ANG needs to reduce the requirements of the bonus from a four-year minimum to a one-year minimum for a lesser amount. By reducing the length of commitment, the take rate of the AvB would increase, and the retention problem would decrease. The ANG should allow federal technicians to receive an AvB that brings their pay up to on par with their AGR counterparts. Currently, federal technicians make significantly less than their AGR counterparts.⁵⁴ In addition to the federal technicians, the ANG should give incentives to its Drill Status Guardsmen (DSG) fighter pilots.⁴ Although the primary manning crisis within the ANG is in the full-time instructor cadre, the part-time force is genuinely the nation's reserve force, and the ANG must preserve DSG manning. Offering a bonus to the DSG fighter pilot would disincentivize pilots from leaving the ANG.

Promotion Requirements

The ANG has built their fighter squadron manning documents based on AD fighter squadrons.⁵ The rank structure of the AD manning document seems harmless

³ AGR's act at the primary instructor pilots for ANG units.

⁴ DSGs are part-time employee's of the ANG.

⁵ The Manning document lays out the rank structure of the squadron and limits the number of individuals rank who can be at a specific grade at a given time.

enough, but when digging deeper into the document, there are some very significant flaws which have grave effects on the retention of ANG fighter pilots.⁵⁵ In an AD fighter squadron, there are typically many lieutenants and captains, few majors, and even fewer lieutenant colonels (Lt Col).⁵⁶ Usually, there are two to three Lt Cols in each squadron. Lt Col's serve in the command functions, and as the Operations Officer but not much else. The design of the AD manning document was for the steady flow of new AD fighter pilots flowing in and out of the fighter squadron on a standard three-year cycle. The commanders rotate out, and new commanders rotate in from staff or school. When applying this model to the ANG there is a severe problem. The problem arises because the baseline ANG fighter pilot begins his career at approximately the twelve-year point.⁶ That means that the typical ANG fighter pilot starts out as a senior captain or new major. The real problem arises when those majors reach time in grade for Lt Col, and the manning document within the fighter squadron does not support promotions for all of the eligible majors. The lack of manning document Lt Col billets puts pressure on the current Lt Cols to make room for the promotable major, or it causes the major to begin looking for employment outside of the fighter squadron. In either case, losing a Lt Col before twenty years of service or dropping a major who is promotion eligible is causing a retention deficit.

Beyond the manning document problem, there is also a professional military education (PME) problem that must be solved. Currently, all majors must accomplish intermediate developmental education (IDE) to be promoted to Lt Col. In the AD, having all majors accomplish IDE makes sense to ensure that the commanders of the future have

⁶ Two years of pilot training plus the ten-year ADSC commitment to the AD.

the proper education to serve in command roles. For the ANG, however, not everyone who is staying until twenty years of service will command, nor will a significant portion of the fighter pilots want to do so. Not completing IDE puts a black mark on the officer's resume that can preclude them from promotion to Lt Col, and decreases the amount of time they can serve in the ANG.⁵⁷

The ANG should revamp its manning documents to create more room for promoting majors to Lt Col. By changing the number of Lt Col authorizations in the fighter squadron, the ANG can retain a Lt Col who has already hit the twenty years of service mark. Typically, the Lt Col would retire and make room for the next major who needs to promote. In addition to being able to retain Lt Col's for longer, the ANG will be able to promote more majors and not have the exodus at the senior major rank that is currently happening in the ANG.⁵⁸ Currently, Title Ten of U.S. code requires majors to retire at twenty years of service, while Lt Cols can remain in service to twenty-eight years of service; this will provide a significant increase to the longevity that fighter pilots can serve.⁵⁹ Keeping more fighter pilots in service longer also requires the ANG to look at accommodating pilots who don't necessarily want to command but still have the desire to fly.

The USAF rid itself of warrant officers in 1970 because it didn't have a use for ranks sandwiched in between Non-Commissioned Officers and Officers.⁶⁰ Currently, the USAF needs fighter pilots who "just fly". By allowing a certain percentage of commissioned officer pilots to "just fly" the ANG could solve a big part of its retention problem. Some fighter pilots just want to fly, and the ANG needs to oblige. If selected to the "just fly" program, pilots would not continue to accomplish PME. The pilots

would still have an opportunity to promote, but they would be ineligible for command at any level. They would essentially fill the role of the Warrant Officer as a Commissioned Officer in a "just fly" career track. They could continue to serve until the U.S. Title Ten Code limits and be the experts in their aircraft. By creating a "just fly" career track, the ANG would incentivize the pilots in the organization to stay longer and continue to accomplish the national defense mission without forcing them to complete PME. After fixing the promotion requirement problem, the ANG needs to take better care of its DSG fighter pilots.

DSGs

DSGs make up a significant portion of the fighter pilots who fly for the ANG. The DSGs fly at rates commensurate with full-time ANG and AD pilots, but they do not work for the ANG when they are not doing flying related functions. To maximize retention in the ANG, the ANG must reduce the number of obstacles in the way of fighter pilots who have chosen to move to DSG status and work for the civilian sector. By Adding more flexibility to work schedules, and providing better employment and pay solutions for its DSG pilots. Items including opening more short-term AGR and other types of full time manning positions to help pilots move back to full-time status and utilize the USERRA laws to reach a military retirement and continue to gain seniority in their airline job.⁶¹ In addition to offering full-time orders for extended periods of time, the ANG should implement shorter-term bonuses to incentivize fighter pilots to serve in a full-time status. Currently, most airline pilots take a significant pay cut to fly for the ANG full time, and offering them a bonus would decrease the gap in pay. In addition to increasing the full-time positions and bonuses, the ANG needs to do more for the DSG

fighter pilot. The unit commanders need to accommodate the civilian schedules of their DSG fighter pilots. The commanders need to have the flexibility to adjust requirements on individual cases to increase the effectiveness of their DSG employees. The ANG needs to create and implement a standard schedule planning software that gives the accessibility and flexibility to its DSG pilots. As previously mentioned, the ANG must offer bonuses to make it worthwhile for the DSG pilots. By streamlining the DSG process, and making it easier and more financially beneficial the ANG can keep DSG better integrated into fighter squadrons.

CONCLUSION

The manning crisis is not new, and it will not be the last crisis that the USAF will face. The ANG needs to take steps to stop the crisis and ensure the nation's air defense is secure. The ANG must attack the fighter pilot manning crisis on both the recruiting and retention axis. First, the ANG must do a better job of recruiting. The ANG must seek to hire new pilots that are better prepared and have a higher probability of success. Also, the ANG needs to do a better job of recruiting pilots from the AD. Currently, the percentage of AD that affiliate with the ANG is too low and must increase. Lastly, the ANG must look to the sister services to expand its talent pool. The sister services don't have as many part-time opportunities for their pilots upon leaving the AD, and the ANG must capitalize on the sister services to fill its manning documents with highly trained and experienced USN and USMC aviators.

Next, the ANG must fix its retention problem. The civilian airlines are hiring aggressively, and the ANG must fix the issues that are present to stop pilots from leaving. Increasing bonuses, decreasing operations tempo, and decreasing additional duties will all

help morale and improve retention. Providing fighter pilots with better and more access to health care professionals will also keep more fighter pilots serving in the ANG. Increasing the availability of full-time orders and providing short-term bonus pay will help to entice fighter pilots to remain in the fighter squadrons. For the DSGs, the ANG and unit commanders need to create more accessible processes and remove obstacles to help them stay proficient and productive in the ANG.

The fighter pilot shortage is real and growing in the ANG. The USAF is spending a lot of time, money, and resources trying to solve the problem for the AD. The AD problem is different than the problem because of the different demographics that are present in the ANG. The ANG needs to act to maintain and build on its manning levels quickly. The nation requires the ANG more now than ever in its history for the defense of the country and the USAF and the United States can't afford to have the ANG not appropriately trained, manned, or equipped to defend the nation.

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