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FEDERAL PERSONNEL AND
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The Honorable Verne Orr
The Secretary of the Air Force

Attention: Assistant Auditor General

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Subject: Initial Skill Training for Air Force Enlisted
Personnel, (FPCD-81-61)

During the past few months, we have been in the initial phase of reviewing the Air Force's initial skill training program for its enlisted force. Originally we had planned to assess the effectiveness of the overall initial skill training program, including both institutional and individual on-the-job training (OJT).

During our initial work, however, we found that the Air Force has established extensive internal control systems which provide feedback to training managers on training effectiveness. A recent Office of the Secretary of Defense study of the services' training programs concluded that the Air Training Command " * * * has the best observed system of external feedback." ^{1/} Our limited examination of these internal controls also showed them to be generally effective. We also found that there are several studies of the Air Force skill training programs, some of which are still in process. These studies are listed on page 2.

These existing internal controls and evaluations make it unnecessary, at this time, for us to proceed further with a detailed review. However, we take this opportunity to discuss here (1) some training issues which we believe you need to

^{1/}"Combat Effective Training Management Study," Department of Defense, July 1979.

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address in the coming year and (2) some alternatives for more efficient use of training resources. We will continue to monitor the Air Force's response to the studies identified below.

OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

In surveying the Air Force's initial skill training program, we focused initially on the internal and external feedback control systems. We were particularly concerned with (1) whether there are systems in place which provide training managers with timely feedback on training effectiveness and (2) whether these managers acted upon this information.

In evaluating the feedback system for institutional instruction, we selected three Air Force Specialty Codes for examination and obtained information on them from (1) training evaluation reports, (2) training quality reports, and (3) other evaluation information.

We reviewed available studies which addressed the OJT program and the Air Force's response to these studies. Because some Air Force Inspector General evaluations were still in process, we obtained briefings on the scope of these evaluations. Studies we reviewed or obtained information on included the following:

- A major evaluation by the Air Force Inspector General of the Air Force institutional and OJT program (in process).
- An extensive evaluation by the Air Force Inspector General of aircraft maintenance OJT (in process).
- A "Personnel Issues Survey," by the Air Force Human Resources Laboratory, part of which addresses Air Force enlisted personnel job skills and abilities (in process).
- An Office of the Secretary of Defense report issued in January 1981, entitled "On-the-Job Training in the Department of Defense." This report comments on the general good state of OJT management in the Air Force.
- A Department of Defense report dated July 1979, entitled "Combat Effective Training Management Study." This report critically reviewed all services' institutional and OJT programs and made recommendations for improvement.

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During our survey we held extensive discussions with officials and personnel at Air Force Headquarters, the Air Training Command, the Manpower and Personnel Center, and the Tactical Air Command Headquarters and reviewed various documents on Air Force skill training effectiveness.

We undertook this review because of the large amount of money spent on skill training and its very vital role in the service's ability to accomplish its mission.

TRAINING ISSUES NEEDING ATTENTION

We believe that the following training issues affect the quality of the Air Force's initial skill training program and deserve your prompt attention. These issues are particularly important because the Air Force will likely gain an increased student training load if anticipated end-strength increases are realized.

Inability to Compare OJT and Institutional Training Costs

On July 31, 1979, we issued a report to the Secretary of Defense (FPCD-79-13) in which we pointed out the absence of data on the cost of individual OJT. Without such costs, the services are unable to evaluate, through the Instructional Systems Development process, the cost effectiveness of providing institutional training versus OJT. This issue remains unresolved. While the Air Force has conducted research on the cost of OJT, no acceptable procedure for comparing the cost of OJT with the cost of institutional training has been developed.

A number of studies we reviewed suggested that the services have gone too far in exporting individual training to the units. In response to this, the Air Force is beginning to shift some of the training provided by operational units back to the institution. For example, one study pointed out that the Air Force plans to increase the average length of institutional skill training from 11.0 weeks to 12.5 weeks, at an additional training cost of \$30 million annually.

Under these conditions, the importance of being able to show the cost effectiveness of institutional versus OJT becomes even more important. It may be difficult to justify an increased training budget to the Congress without having comparative cost-effectiveness information.

Need to reassess organization of OJT

During the course of our interviews with Air Force personnel, questions were raised about the soundness of having operational commanders responsible for both operational missions and extensive individual OJT programs. Air Force personnel expressed concern that commanders, when faced with limited resources, will give priority to operational missions at the expense of OJT.

The issue of OJT conflict with operational commitments was also raised in the January 1981 report 1/ on OJT in the Department of Defense. The report states,

"It is obviously more difficult to conduct good OJT * * * when supervisors and trainers are faced with continuous operational requirements. * * * No OJT system will work unless it gets its due share of command attention."

Insufficient number and reduced experience level of trainers

One of the more serious concerns of the Air Force personnel we interviewed was the perceived inability of the Air Force to provide sufficient numbers of trainers to handle student training loads, both existing and projected. Air Force personnel also indicated concern about the quality of trainers, as the Air Force is promoting individuals to the noncommissioned officer ranks at an accelerated rate, thus reducing their average overall experience. Because increases in student training loads will likely aggravate this situation, we believe this matter merits your close attention.

ALTERNATIVES FOR MORE EFFICIENT USE OF TRAINING RESOURCES

We identified two alternatives by which the Air Force might make more efficient use of its training resources. These are (1) increased joint-service training and (2) increased use of civilians and contractor personnel.

Increased joint-service training

One way of reducing training costs and more efficiently using limited training resources without sacrificing training

1/"Report on the OJT Study Task: On-the-Job Training in the Department of Defense," Office of the Secretary of Defense.


effectiveness is to increase joint-service institutional training. The Interservice Training Review Organization (ITRO), established to identify opportunities and to plan for joint use of training courses among the services, is the vehicle for achieving this consolidated training. Past reports by the Defense Manpower Commission, the Congressional Budget Office, and our Office have criticized ITRO for not aggressively identifying and recommending interservice training opportunities. More recently (July 1979) the Combat Effective Training Management Study reported that "* * * the Services are not now pursuing interservice training as vigorously as in the past." Increased use of joint-service institutional training appears to offer opportunities to the Air Force to make better use of its limited personnel resources.

Increased Use of Civilians
and Contractor Personnel

Another alternative for moderating any shortages of skilled trainers while, at the same time, reducing training costs is to use more civilian instructors and/or to do more contracting for skill training. In our report, "Opportunities Exist for Substantial Savings in Administration of Military Skill Training Programs" (FPCD-78-13, Feb. 14, 1978), we concluded that the Department of Defense "could reduce training costs by millions of dollars annually by using more civilian instructors and by contracting for more skill training." In commenting on this conclusion at the time of the report, Air Force officials disagreed saying that a relatively high military-to-civilian instructor ratio was essential because of, among other things, the field experience which military personnel bring to the training environment. Given the frequently mentioned shortage of military instructors, however, the Air Force should reevaluate its current mix with a view toward "shoring-up" any military numerical or quality shortfalls with civilian or contractor-provided trainers.

We are sending copies of this report to appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Defense, and other interested parties.

Sincerely yours,


Clifford I. Gould
Director