

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

PRESENTATION TO THE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL
UNITED STATES SENATE

SUBJECT: RECRUITING

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 UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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RECRUITING

On behalf of the 3,000 men and women of Air Force Recruiting Service, thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee. I am very proud to be associated with the Air Force recruiting effort. As I watch recruiters in action, it's clear to me our nation can be proud of the selfless dedication, integrity, and effort they put forth every day in trying to accomplish our nation's recruiting mission. We view recruiting as the cornerstone for readiness because it is critical to the Air Force's ability to respond to any call with trained, professional airmen. However, as FY99 moves onward, we see a recruiting environment unlike anything we have experienced over the last 20 years.

The continued strong economy with its low unemployment, as well as higher college enrollments, a declining inclination among America's youth to consider joining the military, and a

resulting decline in the awareness among young people of the advantages and benefits of life in the military, have all combined to create an environment extremely challenging for today’s recruiters. Yet, recruiters continue to respond to these challenges with the effort and determination that is indicative of the professionals they are.

ENLISTED RECRUITING

FY98 was a good news/bad news story for Air Force enlisted recruiting. At the beginning of FY98, our enlisted accession goal was 30,000 non-prior service (NPS) individuals. In January 1998, due to reduced retention throughout the Air Force, the Air Staff directed an accession increase of 1,300 NPS individuals for the remainder of the year. Despite the midyear increase, recruiters answered the call and were able to not only meet, but also in some cases, exceed the Extended Active Duty (EAD) goal, ensuring that the right number of recruits were sent to Basic Military Training (BMT) every month. Overall, we finished the year at 100.6% of our requirement. In terms of quality, we were able to exceed our goal of 99% “Tier 1” accessions (high school graduates or individuals with 15 or more semester hours of college). However, we were slightly below our target of 80% of accessions scoring in the top half of the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) (Cat I-III A) achieving only 78%. While the Cat I-III A rate has been dropping over the last few years, the encouraging news is that attrition at Basic Military Training has also been dropping.

	FY95	FY96	FY97	FY98
Cat I-III A	84.0%	82.5%	79.1%	77.6%
BMT Attrition	10.7%	9.8%	9.0%	8.5%

FY98 was also a good year for minority recruiting. We achieved the highest percentage of Black and Hispanic enlisted accessions in recruiting history, accessing 17.4% and 7.2% respectively. The percentage of women enlisting in FY98 dropped slightly from our all time high of 28.1 % in FY97, to a slightly lower 26.2% for FY98.

However, as we proceeded through FY98 we started seeing a warning light for FY99. In seven of the last eight months of FY98, we failed to make our new enlistment contract goals. This meant we started FY99 with a shortage of approximately 2,000 Delayed Entry Program (DEP) airmen in the “bank” (those individuals scheduled to come on active duty in the next 12 months). This was the lowest number of airmen by percentage in the “bank” starting any year since FY81. In addition, our FY99 accession goal increased from 32,800 to 33,800 at the beginning of the fiscal year because of reduced retention throughout the Air Force. The end result was that recruiters were (and are) forced to concentrate on short-term recruiting in FY99 (current month plus next two months) versus the preferred recruiting window of four to seven months out. This has increased the stress on recruiters to find individuals who can ship to BMT on short notice and also increased the likelihood of failing to make our accession mission. In fact, we have missed our goals for shipping to Basic Military Training (BMT) by a total of 696 over the last three months (November through January) and all indications are that we will miss February through May accession goals as well. February through May are typically our toughest recruiting months—so this isn’t a complete surprise. Current year seniors will not graduate until the end of May, and last year’s seniors are difficult to access. The percentage of jobs that have been sold in these months is uncomfortably low. In addition, continued shortages of new enlistment contracts (we have missed 2 of 4 months so far in FY99) also has us concerned about how soon we will be able to recover. Clearly, Air Force Recruiting Service is in grave danger of

missing its accession mission for the first time since FY79. If current trends continue, we may finish FY99 2,000 to 3,000 airmen short of our goal.

While the AFQT scores for FY99 have shown a slight decline from FY98, we have been able to maintain our goal of 99% “Tier 1” accessions. Despite the challenges we face recruiting in today’s competitive marketplace, we intend to retain our Tier 1 standard. The training demands of our high-tech aerospace force require it.

OFFICER RECRUITING

Our officer accession recruiters face a daunting task; persuading doctors, dentists, nurses and other medical professionals with high-earnings potential to become members of the Air Force. Despite this, FY98 was a phenomenal year in Health Professions (HP) recruiting. Air Force Recruiting Service attained 100 percent production in all of its health professions programs—a feat not accomplished since FY87. Although physician recruiting historically has been our most difficult challenge, we not only met our mission, we even overproduced in the critical specialty of family practice.

FY99 HP recruiting promises to be another successful year. Our major concern at this point is nurse recruiting. Requirements for previous nurse experience have made recruiting nurses more challenging, but recruiters will persevere.

In the line officer accessions arena, we successfully met all our FY98 Officer Training School (OTS) goals. Air Force Recruiting Service OTS production provides short-term responsiveness for line officer accessions, since both the U.S. Air Force Academy and Air Force ROTC production pipelines require long-term commitments. We were able to demonstrate our

ability to respond in FY98 when we were asked by Air Staff to bring in 40 additional navigators on short notice to offset U. S. Air Force Academy and AFROTC shortfalls.

In terms of FY99, the OTS outlook is very good. Despite a 128% increase in the OTS goal over FY98, we have already made the overall goal and are now working to fill some of the more technical requirements.

Starting in FY98, we brought chaplain recruiting under the Air Force Recruiting Service umbrella. This has allowed us to leverage our ongoing advertising campaign and increase national awareness of chaplain requirements and opportunities. We were able to make our FY98 chaplain goal of 35 and are on target for the FY99 goal of 40.

ADVERTISING

Last year was a challenging yet successful one for advertising the Air Force to America's youth. We sought and received a boost in advertising funds after noting a combined decline in slogan recognition, advertising awareness, and enlistment propensity. To say FY98 was "A Banner Year" would be an understatement as Air Force Recruiting Service embarked on an extensive Internet advertising program. Throughout the year, banner ads appeared on many commercial web sites in an effort to: (1) maintain an Air Force presence in the marketplace, and (2) generate click-throughs to www.airforce.com. We were highly successful in both aspects. Over 11.5 million impressions were made through banner ads while over 200,000 people clicked on the banner in order to visit our web site. For recruiters, this translated to over 33,000 inquiries from the web. We also capitalized on the appeal of the USAF Aerial Demonstration Team, the Thunderbirds, by creating an on-line air show. Featuring everything from personality profiles,

duty responsibilities, audio and video displays, animation, and much more, this special event generated heightened web activity, the Air Force Recruiting Service-Thunderbirds connection.

Turning to FY99, for the first time in the history of the Air Force, we will be buying advertising on television. The time is right for the Air Force to have a television presence. Television is an important source of information for our target audience and this television buy, starting at the end of February 1999, places our Air Force advertising presence on a level commensurate with our sister services. In light of the difficult recruiting environment, we, the Air Force, need to become more competitive. The infusion of funds for paid television will help us--but not right away. The impact will be long term, providing a more consistent presence in the marketplace. What we must do next is increase our advertising presence in all other media. Our buying power has eroded through the years because media inflation far outpaces our budget increases. Even with this year's increases, we still are buying only the same amount of advertising that we purchased in FY90. As we struggle in meeting our accession mission, we appreciate the continued support of the Congress and the Air Staff in helping solve our advertising budget problems.

While we are solving the shortages of our advertising budget, we are faced with a bigger advertising dilemma that money will not cure. How do we present a relevant recruiting message to young people that also preserves the national sense of duty, honor, country? How do we overcome "service to self" with "service to nation?" In the past, the military played a defining role in the lives of American families. Joining the military was usually viewed as a good thing--often expected. Today, there are few bridges for young people to connect to military service. There are a dwindling number of veterans--fathers and mothers who inspired young people to choose the military. There is a waning interest in military service shown by the growing number

of young people who go straight to college after high school. A booming economy and low unemployment, which we are thankful for, also challenges our recruiting efforts. In the face of all these obstacles, our challenge is to craft an advertising message that presents and preserves the overall professionalism of military service but appeals to the specific needs of the young people we are trying to recruit. Often, the two themes conflict.

As the Air Force enters the 21st century, we will continue to monitor trends within the recruiting market and make appropriate adjustments to our advertising strategy.

RECRUITERS

Recruiter morale is a major concern in these trying times. Our team of Air Force recruiters is working long and hard to meet the personnel needs of our service. Nonetheless, we are failing to meet our recruiting mission. Recruiter production is a lot like lift produced by the wing of an airplane. As you increase the wing's angle of attack, the wing produces more lift. There comes a point, however, where increasing angle of attack will result in a stall. Similarly, we've pushed our Air Force recruiters very hard—now we have to be careful not to push them to the breaking point. Success in meeting our recruiting requirements means we must fully man our recruiter force. Unfortunately, we are currently over 200 recruiters shy of our authorizations, resulting in a diminished Air Force recruiting presence in many communities across America. At all levels of command, Air Force leadership is talking up the benefits and importance of serving as a recruiter—and we are seeing a superb response. Manning is on the rise and we will continue to work this issue hard in the months to come.

RECRUITING INITIATIVES

While the production news for FY99 is not encouraging, we have no intention of remaining idle and of letting today's challenges overwhelm us. We owe it to our recruiters to provide them with the tools they need to be successful in today's environment. Towards that end, we have instituted a number of initiatives and are working many others to enable us to remain competitive and increase awareness about Air Force opportunities. Number one on the list is recruiter manning. As stated earlier, we are over 200 recruiters short of what we are authorized. In the past several years, the Air Force has been able to meet its recruiting goals despite a shortfall of recruiters—in today's environment, a shortfall is untenable. A number of initiatives have been instituted to increase manning and relieve the burden on recruiters: (1) we have worked to get more volunteers for recruiting duty released from their career fields; (2) we increased the Recruiting School class size; (3) we added additional recruiter classes; (4) we added authorizations to the Recruit-the-Recruiter team to help generate more volunteers for recruiting duty; (5) we delayed assignments out of nonprior service (NPS) recruiting billets; and (6) we directed the recruiting groups and squadrons to send some of their recruiters in "support" billets to the field.

There are a number of other initiatives that are helping or will help recruiters. In October 1998, the Air Force initiated an Enhanced Enlistment Bonus program. The scope of this program is unprecedented, encompassing 115 qualifying career specialties and bonuses ranging up to \$9,000 for some 6-year enlistments. The enlistment bonuses have had some success in generating business for our recruiters and have encouraged more airmen to opt for 6-year initial enlistment (last FY 7.8% opted for a 6-year enlistment; this year through January that number is

over 40%). In addition, the Air Staff is also evaluating a college loan forgiveness program to entice more interest in the Air Force among those who have attended some college.

We have also expanded the number of career fields in which prior service individuals can return to the Air Force. To generate interest and encourage these individuals to return, we are sending mail-outs to over 4,000 qualified prior-service individuals.

Of course, two initiatives previously mentioned, television advertising and internet banner advertising, have great potential to help us in today's market.

QUALITY OF LIFE

As recruiters are our lifeblood, we place significant emphasis on those issues directly affecting the quality of life of recruiters. I have already talked about manning issues and recruiter morale. In addition, we are moving out on initiatives focused in two other areas: leveraging tool systems and human systems.

In terms of tool systems, we are leveraging emerging technology. Recruiters have been provided with cellular phones and lap top computers and now have limited access to video-conferencing. In addition, we will soon be fielding the Air Force Recruiting Information Support System (AFRISS). Applicant data will reside on a new computer system that will allow recruiters to immediately update the data and access production statistics via the web. Recruiters will be able to use their laptops to present a multimedia show to applicants, fill out application forms, and transmit to HQ AFRS real-time via the web.

Another tool system is leased family housing. AFRS currently has 170 leases for family and bachelor housing. Combined with the new Basic Allowance for Housing, this program helps lessen the financial burden of providing safe and adequate housing in high-cost areas.

The second area of quality of life initiatives concerns leveraging human systems. AFRS was the first “company” in the U.S. to apply emotional intelligence to the workplace to leverage sales performance. Beginning in 1996, AFRS began using the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQI) to screen potential recruiters for sales potential. First-year turnover due to lack of sales ability dropped 92% , suggesting a potential for saving over \$2.7 million in lost training costs yearly.

In addition to instituting the EQI, AFRS established a Human Resource Development Branch staffed by an Air Force Mental Health Officer and civilian. The focus is to leverage AFRS human capital assets through a “cradle to grave” development approach: finding, hiring, training, and retaining those with the “right stuff.”

While we have been instituting a number of initiatives, there are still some concerns. One of the biggest quality of life problems facing recruiters is healthcare. “TRICARE Remote” is not nationwide, causing recruiters and their families significant difficulties accessing healthcare and paying for it. Even in areas where “TRICARE Remote” is being implemented, there are difficulties enrolling, finding participating providers, and getting bills paid.

We recently administered a Behavioral Health Survey to over 1,300 AFRS personnel. The use of the Behavioral Health Survey combined with focus interviews have indicated the biggest quality of life issues impacting workforce retention to be balancing work/life problems compounded by geographical separation from support resources. Air Force Recruiting Service is currently working with Air Education and Training Command and Air Staff Surgeon General staffs to secure annual support for a nationwide program, currently used in the corporate world, which provides geographically separated personnel and their families 24-hour toll-free assistance to deal with their problems. Such an assistance program would help recruiter families with issues

which run the gamut from parenting and child care issues, including locating and referral to child care facilities; education and schooling issues, including locating and referral to special needs programs; personal and relationship issues, including stress management, marital problems, depression, grief/loss, etc., and referral to mental health and pastoral care resources; as well as everyday life issues including consumer information for big-ticket purchases such as car repair, etc.

Be assured that we are doing everything within our means to improve the quality of life of our recruiters.

CONCLUSION

FY98 was a very successful year for Air Force recruiting. However, that success tends to hide the tremendous challenges that continue to emerge. The difficulties are even more dramatic today, so much so that we are in danger of not making the accession mission for the first time in 20 years. Despite these challenges, the men and women of Air Force Recruiting Service will continue to do all we ask of them and more--but we must not push them beyond the breaking point. Achieving future recruiting goals with the quality of individuals needed to make this the finest aerospace force in the world, will require your continued support for ample recruiting and advertising funding. We look forward to working with you to ensure that tomorrow's Air Force leaders come from the high quality young people of today, recruited from a cross-section of America.