

AFEHRI File 100.086

Research Materials/Source Documents
STUDENT PAPERS

FILE TITLE: Background Paper on College [Education]and the Enlisted Force

AUTHOR: SMSgt Mark, SNCOA Student, undtd, circa 1993

Reviewed by:

AFEHRI Representative G.R. Akin date 30 Dec 97

EPC Representative Joe Cole date 7 Jan 98

Scanner Operator Greg Kados date 7 Jan 98

APPROVED BY:

Gary R. Akin

GARY R. AKIN, CMSgt, USAF

Director

Air Force Enlisted Heritage Research Institute

19-8-65

BACKGROUND PAPER
ON
COLLEGE AND THE ENLISTED FORCE
AN EVOLUTION

This paper will examine the evolution of college education in regard to enlisted Air Force members. Past educational statistics will be presented to allow the reader a since of a "starting point." Recent educational statistics addressing enlisted members will also be examined to show just how far the education level of Air Force enlisted members has increased. Interviews with selected Air Force members will provide the reader with key ideas and feelings why this educational revolution has taken place. The paper will conclude with a few thoughts on the future of college education within the enlisted force structure and some ideas on what the future may hold.

Just how far has the enlisted force progressed in college education since the early days of the Air Force? Chief Master Sergeant Ray White, (8:-) Commandant of the Senior Noncommissioned Officer Academy at Gunter AFB, AL, provides a starting point. He states that in 1952 the average education of an Air Force enlisted member was around the eighth grade level. Today, that type of educational level would not get a prospective recruit on the same block as the recruiting station! In fact, it's interesting to note that most statistics show the recent upsurge in college level for enlisted members probably started in the 1970s. That being the case, it's perhaps best to examine statistics from that time frame.

The Air Force Manpower and Personnel Center provided the following statistics to Air Force Magazine (3:39) in 1976:

- a. Air Force enlisted members with below a high school education: 1.9%.
- b. Air Force enlisted members with some college: 12.7%.
- c. Air Force enlisted members with a baccalaureate degree or higher: 1.7%.

SMSgt MARK, SEM C

It's evident with even these numbers that a marked improvement had taken place since 1952. To truly make a point that college education within the enlisted force has started to evolve, one would have to look at statistics after this date.

By June of 1984 (2:61), the following statistics represent the educational levels of enlisted Air Force members:

- a. Air Force enlisted members with below a high school education: .43%.
- b. Air Force enlisted members with some college: 23.35%.
- c. Air Force enlisted members with an associate degree: 3.56%.
- d. Air Force enlisted members with a baccalaureate degree: 2.52%.
- e. Air Force enlisted members with a masters degree or higher: 0.23%.

These numbers show over a 100% increase in some areas when compared to 1976. Therefore, it's fairly safe to assume one starts seeing this evolution in enlisted college education starting to take place. The most recent statistics show an even more remarkable increase in educational level.

By 1991 (1:44), the following statistics represent college education levels of enlisted Air Force members:

- a. Air Force enlisted members with below a high school education: .01%.
- b. Air Force enlisted members with some college: 49.81%.
- c. Air Force enlisted members with an associate degree: 8.53%.
- d. Air Force enlisted members with a baccalaureate degree: 3.35%.
- e. Air Force enlisted members with a masters or higher: .41%

Another telling statistic is that 10.83% of the enlisted force had two to three years of college credit without a degree of any type awarded. Certainly, these individuals are very close to some type of degree by this time. These figures, once again, represent a quantum leap in just the last eight years. Perhaps it's best to ask the question -- why? The why can be answered best by those who lived through and experienced this educational evolution.

CMSgt Ray White (8:-), Commandant of the USAF Senior Noncommissioned Officer Academy, has attained a masters degree while on active duty. He entered the Air Force in May of 1968 with a small amount of college and a high school education. His tours of duty have allowed him to experience this evolution first-hand.

White says in his early years of service that no one really 'pushed' college education for enlisted members. The focus, he feels, was on task completion and the perception that this type of education was for officers and not enlisted personnel. He relates that one of the major reasons college education has 'taken-off' for enlisted members is due to the increase in technology at the end of World War II. Because of this technology, a higher education level was needed to apply mission requirements with new equipment. Another factor, he feels, was the development of the Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) during the early 1970s.

Chief White calls the Community College of the Air Force the 'driving factor' in the increase of college level education within the enlisted force. CCAF, which gives credit to Air Force enlisted members for job related training, has started thousands of enlisted members on the road to an associate degree. Because of this, White sees a major transition taking place today within the enlisted force.

This transition is taking the Air Force out of the 'brown shoe' days into a new future. A future where the 'social separation' of officers and enlisted personnel because of college education is starting to disappear. White feels, because of this transition, the future may hold even more education for enlisted members.

He sees a bachelors degree as being an 'unwritten' requirement for all future commandants at the Senior Noncommissioned Officer Academy. White also feels many officer positions will be filled by noncommissioned officers in the future because of the recent military drawdown. These NCOs will have

to have the education level of the people they replace. By 2010, he reflects probably all enlisted personnel will have some type of college level credit.

Dr. Billy Hunter (5:-) is the educational advisor to the commandant at the USAF Senior Noncommissioned Officer Academy at Gunter AFB, AL. He has a PhD in Education. He enlisted in the Navy in 1950 and joined the Air Force in 1957, later retiring from service in 1974. Many of his comments agree with those stated by Chief White. He also has thoughts of his own as to why the enlisted force's education has been increasing.

Hunter states that in the late 1950s and into the 1960s one could receive extra credit for promotion by having some type of college credit. Even with that being the case, the feeling at that time was, education is "okay", but not something one really needed for the job; the ultimate accomplishment of the enlisted member was success on the job. However, he says there was a change of perception taking place by the late 1960s and into the 1970s.

During the 1970s, Hunter feels the Air Force started viewing college level education for enlisted members a little differently. It was during this time frame college education started being viewed as a "marketable quantity" by many Air Force leaders and enlisted members. He also views the future as one of many changes and a continued evolution of enlisted college education.

By 1994, all Professional Military Education instructors in the Air Force must have a minimum of an associate degree to continue teaching. Dr. Hunter says, "This is the best thing to happen since sliced bread." He feels this requirement represents a solid base of writing skills, oral skills, and leads to complex reasoning skills. Just the sort of thing that needs to be taught to all enlisted members. Hunter also sees major changes in the medical field in the near future. Because the ratio of officers to enlisted must come down, he sees the possibility of many enlisted members taking over many of these positions -- if they have the college education necessary to do so.

Dr. Hunter lends credence to the theory of an ongoing evolution of education taking place within the enlisted force. Another individual who has some pertinent thoughts on this process is SMSgt Robert Terry.

SMSgt Robert Terry (7:-) is an academic instructor at the USAF Senior Noncommissioned Officer Academy at Gunter AFB, AL. He earned his masters degree while on active duty. He entered the Air Force in December of 1971. When he enlisted, he had a high school education. His recollection of his early years in the Air Force sound very much like Chief White's.

Terry states that early in his career, education was frankly low on his priority list and low in the eyes of his supervisors. The feeling was education tended to take a person away from his/her job and for that reason was not really supported. In fact, a person had a better chance to represent the squadron in sporting events than they had attending college classes. He sees the recent increase in enlisted education as a "changed perception" or outlook on the part of the enlisted members themselves.

He feels in the 1970s and 1980s, enlisted members started to look at the "rest of their lives." Terry feels these people started to view education as something that would not only help them gain possible promotion, but it was something that could be used after one's military career. People started saying things like, "Well, education can't hurt you." Terry also feels a college education builds interpersonal skills and makes one more versatile throughout the rest of their life. Chief White, Dr. Hunter, and SMSgt Terry are all from the same location with pretty much the same thoughts about college education and the enlisted force. What about members from other locations -- do they feel the same?

CMSgt Jayne Shorey (6:-) is the Commandant of the Air National Noncommissioned Officer Academy at McGhee Tyson Air Base, Knoxville, TN. She entered the Air National Guard in 1967 and has over 26 years of active duty. She also earned two masters degrees during her military service. Many of her

years of service have been spent in the recruiting field. Because of this, she is able to shed some different light on the evolution of college education within the enlisted force.

Shorey feels many enter the Air Force and Air National Guard today to take advantage of the college tuition assistance available. With the cost of college increasing yearly, many people join the military to attend college which they probably wouldn't be able to do otherwise. She states the person joining the military today is a different one than joined forty years ago.

Chief Shorey states young people entering the Air Force today are required to have a high school education and many enter with some college behind them. Because of this, it only makes sense since many of them will continue their education while in the military. She feels this is certainly one of the major advantages of having an all volunteer force. For with an all volunteer force, the Air Force is able to "pick and choose" among the most qualified, thus ensuring a higher education and a higher quality force. The Director of Education at the same institution that CMSgt Shorey is commandant, echoes many of her thoughts.

SMSgt Bruce Damrow is Director of Education at the Air National Guard Noncommissioned Officer Academy at McGhee Tyson Air Base, Knoxville, TN. He has earned an associate degree and baccalaureate degree while on military duty. He entered the Air National Guard in 1969 and has seen many changes with enlisted perception of the worth of a college education.

Damrow states he remembers in the early 1970s, many enlisted members thought a college education was for officers, but not for enlisted members. He feels that perception started to change drastically in the 1980s because of the many different tuition assistance plans available to members to further their education. He also feels CCAF has played a major role in starting enlisted members off on the "right foot" by providing a structure where enlisted members can attain an associate degree. Once the associate degree

is earned, many members find it plausible to carry it one step further toward the bachelors degree.

SMSGt Damrow feels the future will see more increases in college educational levels for enlisted members due to more technological tasking. He also feels some Air Force specialties may require an associates degree much the same as Professional Military Education will by 1994. What kind of conclusions can be drawn at this point?

The following factors seemed to have played a major role in the evolution of college education within the enlisted force:

- a. Members have more education at their time of enlistment.
- b. The theory of a "volunteer force" has enhanced ongoing college education.
- c. Financial aid to military members has made it easier to continue their education.
- d. Community College of the Air Force has provided enlisted members an avenue for turning task training into college credits.
- e. College education seems to enhance promotion opportunities.
- f. Job and task requirements call for a greater education level due to new and unique technology.
- g. Enlisted members perceptions have changed throughout the years.

One could probably find many more factors than those listed above with a much more thorough research than this paper has presented. However, the above factors would be present in any additional research undertaken.

This paper has addressed the evolution of college level education within the Air Force enlisted force structure. An examination of statistics revealed major increases in educational levels throughout the enlisted force. Enlisted and educational leader's thoughts were examined to obtain reasons as to why or what has been the factors involved in this evolution of education. It also provided some conclusions as to factors which seem to have a direct correla-

tion to this increase in college education.

College education within the enlisted force will continue to expand in the future. Regardless of the reasons, or the factors involved, perhaps what is taking place is simply an *evolutionary* process.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. *Air Force Magazine*, published by Air Force Association. Vol. 74, No.5, (May 1991), pp 44.
2. *Air Force Magazine*, published by Air Force Association. Vol. 68, No.5, (May 1985), pp 61.
3. *Air Force Magazine*, published by Air Force Association. Vol. 59, No. 5, (May 1976), pp 39.
4. Damrow, Bruce D., SMSgt, USAF. Telephone Interview, Gunter AFB, AL, 21 Apr 1993.
5. Hunter, Billy Dr. Personal Interview. Gunter AFB, AL, 20 Apr 1993.
6. Shorey, Jayne E., CMSgt, USAF. Telephone Interview, Gunter AFB, AL, 21 Apr 1993.
7. Terry, Robert., SMSgt, USAF. Personal Interview. Gunter AFB, AL, 20 Apr 1993.
8. White, Ray., CMSgt, USAF. Personal Interview, Gunter AFB, AL, 19 Apr 1993.