

AFEHRI File 100.099

**Research Materials/Source Documents
STUDENT PAPERS**

FILE TITLE: Training Enlisted Personnel as Pilots

AUTHOR: SMSgt Leonard J. Winston, SNCOA Student, Sep 1989

Reviewed by:

AFEHRI Representative *G.R. Akin* date 30 Dec 97

EPC Representative *John J. ...* date 9 Feb 98

Scanner Operator *Sam ...* date 27 Feb 98

APPROVED BY: *Gary R. Akin*
GARY R. AKIN, CMSgt, USAF
Director
Air Force Enlisted Heritage Research Institute

7th
12-12
P

USAF ENLISTED HERITAGE HALL
GUNTER AFB, AL 36114

USAF SENIOR NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER ACADEMY (AU)

TRAINING ENLISTED PERSONNEL AS PILOTS

by

LEONARD J. WINSTON
Senior Master Sergeant, USAF

(89-E)

A SUMMATIVE EXAM: WRITTEN COMMUNICATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
September 1989

AIR UNIVERSITY
GUNTER AIR FORCE BASE ALABAMA

INTRODUCTION

If the United States became involved in a conflict today, would we have sufficient pilots to fly our aircraft and fight at a level to win? We continually hear and read of the concern over pilots who leave the Air Force to secure employment with commercial aviation. In the Annual Report to Congress for Fiscal year 1990, Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci noted:

Our tactical air forces are currently losing more than one experienced fighter pilot per day, each representing a full replacement cost of more than \$2.5 million. The situation could reach crisis proportions if stronger measures are not taken soon to improve trends.

(11:103)

Mr Carlucci also predicted the Aviator Continuation Pay (ACP), authorized by Congress for FY 1989, would cut the shortage by half but would not alone solve the problem. I agree entirely. I believe the Air Force is overlooking its biggest resource--its enlisted members, "the source within the force".

The purpose of this paper is to convince the reader that the USAF should train qualified enlisted personnel to fly support aircraft.

The idea of training military personnel without college degrees to fly support aircraft is not new, but should be considered carefully before being dismissed.

In this paper, I will discuss the precedent established in U. S. history which first allowed enlisted men to be trained to fly. I will also highlight some reasons why our officer pilots are leaving and why it is so important to act now. Lastly, I will present a plan to alleviate the shortage. A plan which is grounded in our history.

DISCUSSION

Enlisted personnel began piloting military aircraft in 1912. Cpl Vernon Burge flew one of the first bi-planes purchased by the Army to the Philippines. The first decision to officially train enlisted personnel to fly military aircraft was directed by Congress through the Army Air Corps Act of 1926. As noted by J.H. MacWilliam, LtCol, USAF, (retired), a former enlisted pilot in Sergeants magazine, "the act called for 20 percent of the pilots in tactical units to be enlisted men." (3:28) Although, enlisted pilots were trained at an average of 50 per year to a peak of 117 in 1934. There was still much resistance to this training in the Department of the Army.

By the beginning of WWII, most enlisted pilots had either been commissioned or had left the military. On 3 June 1941, Congress enacted Public Law 99. This law clearly authorized the training of Army enlisted men as pilots. With the severe shortage of pilots threatening to cripple the war effort, this public law really "got the ball rolling."

From the beginning of the training program in August 1941, to the end in October 1942, a total of 2,143 men were trained. All graduates were rated as pilots and warranted as a "Staff Sergeant Pilot"-- a new grade.

A recent article on enlisted pilots in the Scott AFB COMMAND POST, stated:

The intent of the pilots program was to fill the essential and unglamorous needs of military aviation. They were to be utility pilots, to haul cargo and people, and to be instructors. (7)

Though some sergeants pilots were assigned to unglamorous tasks, many others flew fighters such as P-38, P-39, P-51 and Spitfires. J. H. Macwilliam again noted " that members of the first class to graduate in March 1942 accounted for 130 enemy aircraft shot down in aerial combat and produced nine of World War II's fighter aces." (4:15)

Many others flew B-17, B-26 and B-29 bombers, participated in aerial photo reconnaissance, ferried aircraft from factories to base all over the world and trained new officer pilots in operational tactics. Sixteen are known to have been pilots for general officers including Charles Bennett, personal pilot for Gen Dwight D. Eisenhower. (4:16) Many received commissions prior to going into combat, but records show eight sergeant pilots were killed in combat. (4:16)

From the proud beginning in 1912 by Cpl Vernon Burge of the Army Signal Corps to the last Air Force enlisted pilot, MSGT George Holmes who retired in 1957, over 3000 enlisted pilots wore rated pilots wings.

In reviewing some of the history of enlisted pilots, one problem of that time period currently exists today. There is still need for more military pilots.

Although there are no critical war needs pushing our government, the factors affecting the retention of our military pilots should be addressed.

The United States Air Force has been losing pilots in the six to eleven year group at an alarming rate. I'm sure there are many reasons why highly trained personnel decide to stop doing something others would give their "first born" to do---fly.

Col Robert H. Foglesong, in an AIR FORCE TIMES commentary entitled "The Case of the Vanishing Pilots", highlights one significant reason why many highly trained pilots exit the Air Force.

First, and possibly the most significant, was the resurgence of significant hiring by the airlines. It started in 1984, and in 1985 the number of pilots hired was nearly twice that of any previous period in commercial aviation history". (2:24-25)

The military and the Air Force in particular have always been a fertile training ground for the commercial airlines. The Future Aviation Professionals of America (FAPA) stated that 42,000 to 52,000 new airline pilots will be needed in the next decade. (6:92) The U.S. airline industry currently has no in-house training programs to grow pilots for their companies. Northwest Airlines along with the University of North Dakota (UND), is establishing a program to train pilots ab initio (from the beginning) as some foreign airlines in Germany and Britain are currently doing.

The military should not cheer yet though. The biggest problem is obtaining an FAA exemption to allow these new pilots to move thru the ratings and into airlines jobs with fewer flying hours. Northwest has

installed state-of-the-art full motion simulators and training methods which place training costs in excess of \$40,000, with no guarantee of job placement, even by Northwest at graduation.(6:92) Even with such good job prospects, there is still dissatisfaction among those who occupy military cockpits.

Lack of meaningful training opportunities is still a problem for many military pilots. During the late seventies and early eighties, with prices of petroleum decreasing, and readiness in question, more exercises were planned and carried out. Phrases like "Train as you plan to fight" came into vogue. Setting training scenarios and exercises to simulate real combat. Training improved significantly for aircrews in general.

However, subsequent budget and manpower cutbacks, caused reductions in flying hours. As a current aircrew member in multi-crew aircraft, I have seen pilots fill up available seating just to keep current. According to a AVIATION WEEK and SPACE TECHNOLOGY editorial, "Air Force tactical fighter pilots average fewer than 20 hrs a month. (9:9) Not much to keep a highly motivated individual happy for very long. Add increased temporary duty separations from families because of the pilot shortages, additional duties, assignments to higher headquarters staffs and normal unit paper work blues ,and the world of the commercial airline pilot begins to look pretty good.

Pilots who do leave to fly for the airlines can sometimes have their cake and eat it too. They simply join the Reserves for the satisfaction of flying fighter aircraft while enjoying the monetary benefits of the commercial airlines. Though the Air Force may feel it can continue to recruit qualified people from Air Force Academy (AFA), Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), active duty officers selected for pilot training, and Officer Training School (OTS) applicants ; the well may be running a little drier in the future.(8)

Population trends show the lifeblood of the military, manpower is getting smaller.

The U.S. Census Bureau is projecting the slowest rate of population growth in United States history after 1995 and a declining population rate after 2038. David E. Bloom and Neil Bennett confirm in their "Future Shock" article in NEW REPUBLIC that the last "Baby Boomers" of the 1960's have passed out of their late teen years.(1:20) This means the pool of available males will continue to shrink.

The growing menace of cocaine abuse among our youth and the spread of the deadly virus AIDS will also significantly affect the male population into the 21st century. All these factors point out that the shortage of pilots is growing, and some traditional fixes may not cure the problem.

Sometimes the resources to solve problems are so close we just do not see them. The USAF should go to the largest resource it currently has--the enlisted force,"the source within the force."

My solution is to utilize the resources we have and bring back the enlisted pilot program. There are hundreds of enlisted members with private commercial licenses in the Air Force who could become the core of the initial test group for training. Enlisted members with licenses could forego the flight screening programs directed in AFR 50-5, Air Force Formal Schools, saving time and money. (10:3-151) Additional savings could be

realized by allowing volunteers who are already in flying career fields to apply for pilot training. Flight engineers and crew chiefs possess technical knowledge and familiarity with aircraft. Savings in training cost could be substantial. Requirements for flight physicals and survival schools, in many cases will have been met.

Prerequisites should be determined by HQ USAF with consideration of previous aviation knowledge or technical experience (commercial license, flight engineer or crew crew experience). Education level can be considered but should not be the sole basis for elimination.

Major Harry O. Mamaux quoted an 17 July 1943, Headquarters Army Air Force Training Command Psychological Statistical report about educational levels of the enlisted pilots.

The largest percentage of men graduated was among younger men, men who wanted to be pilots, and oddly enough, men with less education. Individuals with 8th grade or lower education had the highest percentage of graduates of those entering. (5:13)

He stated the report also pointed out the training itself had adequate discrimination or elimination and that the two years of college requirement at the time was not needed for elimination. Nominees would be screened by a central board as some officer pilot candidate and promotion boards are currently conducted. Qualified enlisted members would be trained to fly support aircraft such as tankers, transport, observation and reconnaissance aircraft. They would be awarded pilot wings at the completion of training and promoted to the grade of Flight Officer. Flight Officer would be equivalent to Warrant Officer 1 rating but would receive flight pay equal to second lieutenant. Equal work for equal pay. Flight Officers would not feel slighted or inferior because they were paid less for the same job.

Promotions could be handled as the old Air Force warrant program was, with senior and chief Flight Officer ratings. A career path for the Flight Officer field could be developed as the Space Command or Joint Service officer paths have been.

If we can avoid the egos and sensibilities of many who would rather "fight than switch", then this difficult problem can be solved.

CONCLUSION

I have demonstrated that there is a solution to the problem of pilot retention in the Air Force. There is a precedent for training enlisted personnel to fly military aircraft. They did so honorably and successfully in peacetime and during World War II.

I have also pointed out that we are losing many of our highly trained pilots to the commercial airlines industry. The airlines demand for skilled pilots coupled with pilot dissatisfaction over lack of sufficient flying time, meaningful training and other irritants is an immediate problem.

The manpower pool that both the military and civilian employers rely on is shrinking because of low birth rates, nationwide drug abuse among the young and the spread of AIDS.

The solution is to utilize the untapped resource--the enlisted force. Many enlisted have commercial licenses and many have the technical aptitude and ability to fly. They would become flight officers upon completion of training and receive pay as a flying warrant officer.

I recommend that the Air Force reinstate the flight officer program. HQ USAF/XOORC should task Air Force Military Personnel Center immediately to survey the enlisted population for members with commercial pilot licenses willing to volunteer for flight training.

They should also solicit volunteers from the flight engineer and crew chief career fields. HQ USAF through the Defense Department should request Congress change the law to reinstate the Flight Officer rating. HQ USAF should also develop training criteria, new rank and a career path for the Flight Officer field.

Enthusiasm and advertisement by the Air Force will make this program work. With pilot retention rates dropping, and with the Air Force projecting a shortfall of 1,583 in Fiscal 1993, the pilot bonus program is on the front burner. Congress is still either unconvinced of the need or unable to respond with more funding because of budget constraints. In the long run, this may not be the answer.

The retention rates for enlisted have never been higher. The enlisted forces, especially the non-commissioned officers, have always been touted as "the backbone of the military services". We are taught and reminded of our leadership responsibilities and of being "team players for the mission". Show the enlisted personnel that they are part of the team and let us get the mission done.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Bloom, David E., and Neil G. Bennett. "Future Shock." New Republic 19 June 1989, p. 20
2. Foglesong, Robert H., Col, USAF. "The Case of the Vanishing Pilots." Air Force Times. 19 June 1989, pp. 24-25
3. MacWilliam, J.H. "Enlisted Pilots - A Forgotten Legacy". Sergeants. January 1984, p. 28 Part IV.
4. -----. "Enlisted Pilots - A Forgotten Legacy". Sergeants. June 1984, pp. 15-18 Part VI
5. ~~Harry G.~~ Harry G., Major, USAF. "The Enlisted Pilot Program in the USAAF 1941-1942: Was it Successful? Unpublished executive summary, Air Command and Staff College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, Alabama, 1984
6. McClellan, J. Mac. "Ab Initio Training: Airlines Address the Pilot Shortage." Flying. February 1988, p. 92
7. Proctor, Annie., Sgt. "The Forgotten Heros". Scott AFB Command Post. 2 June 1989.
8. Secretary of the Air Force. Under Graduate Pilot Training. 86-53. Office of Public Affairs Washington D.C.
9. "Slip the Surly Bonds...". Aviation Week and Space Technology 13 June 1988, p. 9
10. USAF Formal Schools. AFR 50-5, June 1989 p. 3-155
11. U S Superintendent of Documents. Report of the Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci on the FY 1990/ FY1991 Biennial Budget and FY 1990-94 Defense Programs. 17 January 1989, p. 103
Washington DC : Government Printing Office.