

4. Pilot Flow to the Air Reserve Component

The post-Cold War drawdown is changing the force mix equation particularly for the Air Force,¹ with possible implications for pilot flows from the active to reserve components. These flows are critical to the Air Force Reserve (AFRES) and Air National Guard (ANG), which rely heavily on accessions of prior service pilots.

A growing share of aircraft and missions are being housed in the ARC as the Air Force draws down. Although the post-Cold War drawdown has reduced active Air Forces by roughly one-third, the Air Reserve Components have not faced significant cuts. ARC units are slated to grow from 33 percent to 42 percent of the total force by 1995. Active/reserve mix in several MWSs, including fighters, tankers, and tactical airlift, will be close to 50 percent.² This underscores the importance of keeping a total force perspective when analyzing the effects of reducing active force size.

Figure 14 distributes total 1989–1992 ARC hires by source: prior active service; prior reserve service, UPT, and other, which includes experienced pilots from other services. The ANG draws over 50 percent of its hires from the actives and the AFRES is even more heavily dependent on them. The median prior service hire into the ARC had completed 7 years of service (or the minimum ADSO) and approximately 85 percent of them have 6–12 YOS.

Typically, 40 percent of Air Force pilot separations affiliate with the ARC and there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that the ARC have been demand-constrained. Indeed, AFRES cites a waiting list of over 1,500 in 1993 and certainly, with the current AF drawdown, the ARC faces a rich recruiting environment with a larger-than-usual reserve pool of prior service separations on which to draw. This is illustrated in Figure 15, which adopts a loss cohort perspective. It shows Air Force losses by year and the cumulative number of ARC hires from each of these loss cohorts.

¹The Navy should not have a problem manning its reserve pilot force. The active-reserve ratio (in terms of tactical aircraft) is around 6 for the Navy and increases to between 10 and 12 in later years (FY95–FY97) because of the loss of an air wing in the reserve.

²For FY96, tactical airlift, aerial refueling (strategic tankers), and tactical fighter units of the Air Reserve Component aircraft are 78 percent, 56 percent, and 40 percent of the Total Air Force (DoD, 1995).

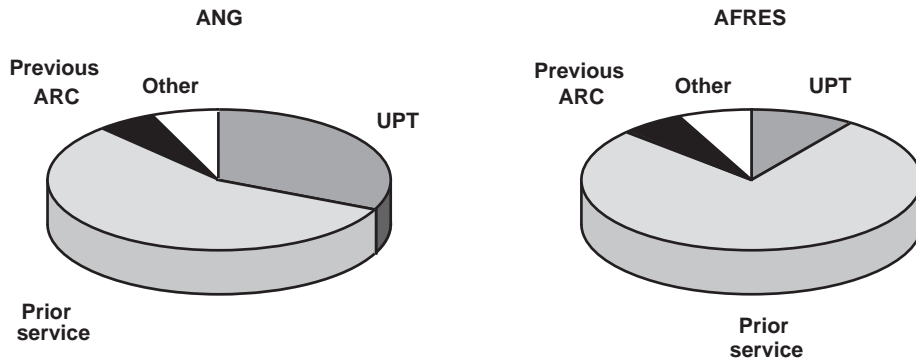


Figure 14—ARC Hiring

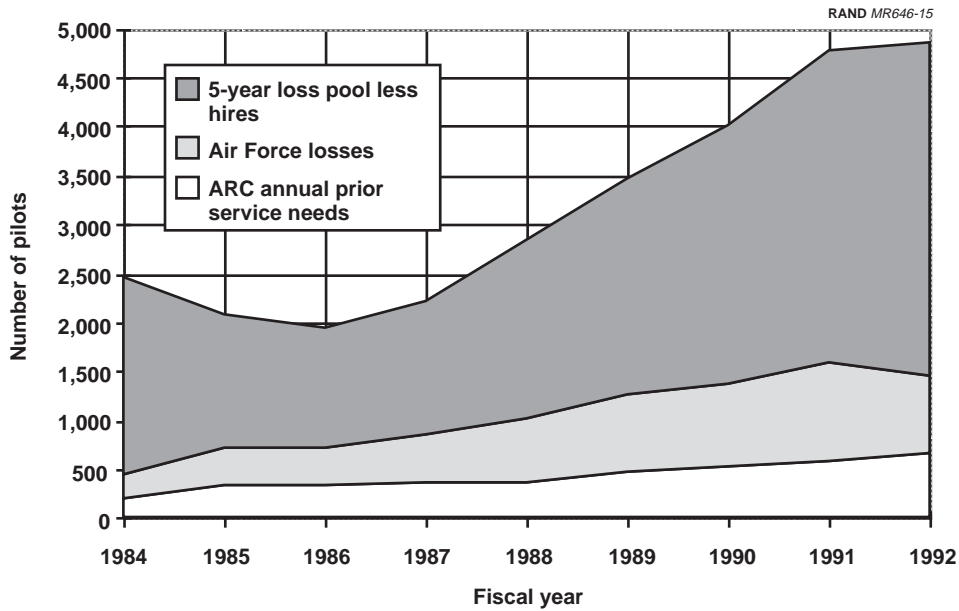


Figure 15—ARC Hiring, FY84–FY92

However, the situation is likely to change quite dramatically in the future as projected hiring requirements exceed projected losses from the active, as shown in Figure 16. ARC requirements remain fairly constant but losses (estimated using base case assumptions discussed above) from the Air Force will be considerably smaller because of the smaller cohorts. The situation may be somewhat mitigated by the large reserve pools that currently exist, but the ARC prefers to hire pilots within five years of separation, since these pilots require little or no retraining. Those separated for five or more years are typically regarded as ineligible or undesirable.

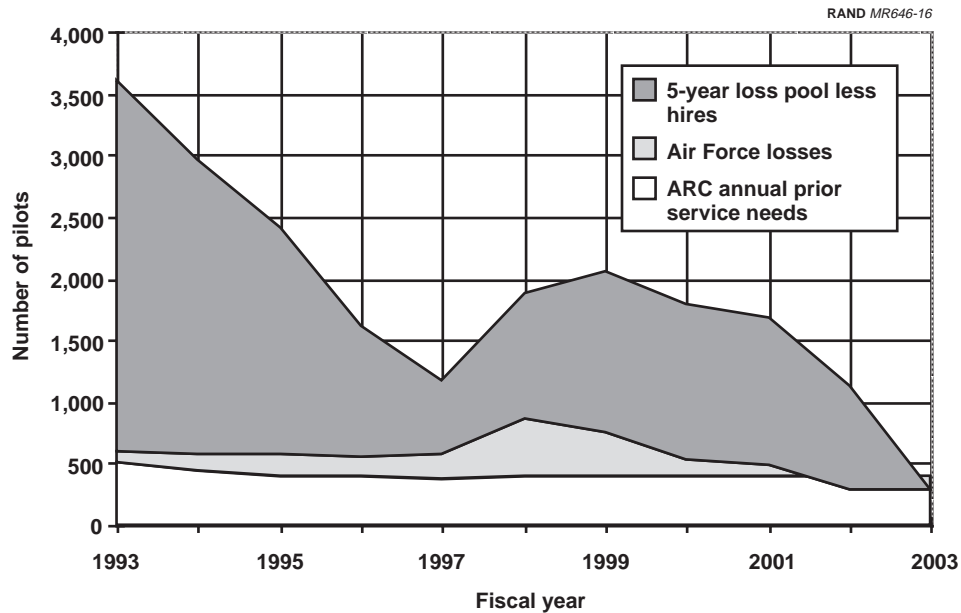


Figure 16—ARC Hiring, FY93–FY02

In particular, some MWSs in the ARC face a bleak and uncertain hiring environment, in which ARC annual prior service needs far outpace projected Air Force losses. For example, in tactical airlift, a likely future shortage is being driven by the very low numbers of such tactical air forces housed in the active compared to the reserve.

The discussion above underscores the need for a total force perspective when considering reductions in force for the active. Prior service pilots form the bulk of the experience and hires of the ARC pilot force and the reductions and policies being adopted by the active could seriously jeopardize the flow to the ARC and, thus, its future readiness. Closer reserve integration may well be the answer, modeled after programs such as the Army's 2+2+4 for enlisted personnel, which marries a reserve obligation to the active term of service.

Maintaining flows to the ARC should be a high priority for the Air Force and an integral part of their discussions when considering the implementation of policies aimed at pilot management. The large reserve pool of prior service pilots fueled by the active drawdown offers a breathing space before ARC readiness and recruiting are compromised and gives the services time to promulgate policies designed to forestall future problems in both the active and reserve components.

We suggest several policy options without any serious attempt at evaluation. Some may be infeasible or undesirable; all may warrant further study.

1. Increase UPT or find alternative sources for ARC pilots.
2. Retire certain ARC pilots later (e.g., strategic and tactical airlift pilots).
3. Coordinate ARC hiring within a five-year window.
4. Relax ARC ideal prior-service profile (in terms of YOS and affiliation gap).
5. Seek more prior-service pilots from other services.
6. Hire more prior-service ARC pilots.
7. Reduce ADSO and tie commitment to ARC service.