The All-Volunteer Force: A Historical Perspective

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Prologue

It's been almost thirty years since the draft played a role in procuring manpower for the military. On Defense Secretary Melvin Laird's watch, in December of 1972, the last draft call was made. And on June 30, 1973, the last draftee—Dwight Elliott Stone—entered the military as legal authority to conscript young men like him expired. The operation of the Selective Service System and the local draft boards that supplied the Army (and sometimes the Marine Corps) with residual manpower when the supply of volunteers was exhausted was put on deep standby. Instead young men (and women in increasing numbers) signed up for the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force of their own volition. Conscription had been used for over 30 years to supplement the active duty enlisted ranks and press yet others to "volunteer" (some reluctantly) not only for Army and Marine Corps enlisted positions but for the Navy and Air Force enlisted ranks, the officer corps, or Selected Reserve duty. For many, the act of volunteering was a wager to avoid the riskiest of duty as a combat soldier or marine.

The draft is not a basic building block for garnering personnel for the U.S. military—our Colonial ancestors did not warm to the idea of forced federal service. Conscription has always been controversial, even when it was used for the Civil War, World War I, and World War II. And since it "has existed for only 33 of the approximately 200 years since the Declaration of Independence, it is difficult to consider the draft an American tradition."\(^1\) However, since World War II, when our nation emerged as a superpower with global responsibilities, the draft was seen as a necessity not only in time of war, but also to empower a large standing force in peacetime. The decision to end the draft was influenced by politics and practicality (mostly the former), yet the decision did not come easy. Sustaining a large, active volunteer force has been no simple task either. And, though the draft ended in 1973, and the last conscript was discharged in November 1974, commentary and controversy over the appropriateness of sole reliance on volunteers did not subside quickly and continue to reverberate today.

It is a fitting time to evaluate our All-Volunteer Force (AVF). A lot has happened since the demise of draft authority in 1973. The U.S. Armed Forces have weathered lingering resentment, turned suspicion of the profession of arms, a declining manpower pool, criticisms regarding poor quality personnel and a hollow force, as well as a host of missions and deployments. The AVF helped win the Cold War and continues to show its colors in responding

to threats, conflicts, wars, and uncertainty in an unstable world beleaguered by regional, national, and ethnic conflict.

This chapter describes the transition to the All-Volunteer Force and then goes on to describe the major issues in its recent history—the 25 plus year history of the AVF. The many issues that may whet the readers appetite (e.g., force composition and social representation, quality and performance, recruiting and compensation, missions, technology and so forth) are taken up in more detail in the ensuing chapters.

Ending the Draft

In 1968, Presidential candidate Richard M. Nixon promised not only to reform, but to look into ending the draft. Of course this idea was no great revelation, as the divisiveness of the war in Vietnam and the inequities of the draft permeated the political and social atmosphere. In fact, "looking into" the draft was nothing new. Senator Barry Goldwater (R-AZ), seeking the 1964 Republican presidential nomination, said he intended to end the draft. Other public figures such as George McGovern and Adlai Stevenson were also proponents of volunteerism. The popular press as well as student newspapers and pamphlets and assorted professional monographs and discussions were calling for draft alternatives in such forms as national service and universal military training. And, amidst the raging war in Vietnam and the concomitant draft card burnings and other protests of the time, the Defense establishment had initiated policy studies on volunteer recruitment. A study commissioned in 1964 by then-President Lyndon B. Johnson that concluded that a volunteer force was feasible by the early 1970s was shelved. Other conferences, discussions and reports had much the same fate, purportedly because the escalation in Vietnam made the debate moot.

Criticisms of the draft and reports of its abuses and inequities grew nonetheless, as did the U.S. presence in Southeast Asia. Among the more notorious manpower scandals was the unfavorable effect of deferment policy on Black youth. Although every young man, upon reaching the age of 18, had to register for the draft within the Selective Service System, by no means was entry into the military (particularly the active component) certain or universal. With a growing surplus of male youth in the face of higher draft calls, student and professional "channeling" was the norm and the burden was selective. Such exemptions or deferments based on college attendance and occupational criticality (in addition to "hiding out" in the National Guard and Reserves) had disadvantageous effects on lower socioeconomic groups, to say the least. Other injustices and inequities of the draft included local draft board retaliation against

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2 This section draws largely from the work of former colleague Gus C. Lee, a senior analyst within the Office of the Secretary of Defense during the time of transition from the draft. His inside knowledge and insightful recollections of this time are documented in Gus C. Lee, & Geoffrey Y. Parker, Ending the Draft--The Story of the All Volunteer Force, FR-PO-77-1, (Alexandria, VA: Human Resources Research Organization, April 1977).

protestors by reclassifying students from II-S (Student deferment) to I-A (immediately available for military service).

General Lewis B. Hershey, Director of the Selective Service and adamant supporter of the draft—in peace and war—supported not only conscription, but also the policy of induction as punishment. He extended channeling to include having the local draft board rather than the educational institutions decide which students were deserving of a deferment. In addition to such flagrant misuse of the power of conscription, reform was sought to curb the disruptive effects of the prolonged period of liability and hence uncertainty. A young man might be called to arms anywhere between the ages of 18½ through 25. Such an anxiety-provoking policy was tolerated on the grounds that to cut back on the range was to detract from enlistments.

To be sure, the draft was never a welcomed career calling card even in more "popular" wars, and inequities have existed going back to Civil War and even Colonial days. But the opposition to the seemingly senselessness and injustice of the Vietnam War together with Selective Service policies that appeared blatantly haphazard, if not arbitrary or even diabolical in picking only a relative few from the growing baby boom generation (there was an annual count of around 1.9 million 19 year old men and inductions were just shy of 30%), began to undermine the legitimacy of the draft.

Project 100,000 stands as an example of a puzzling manpower policy. In 1966, then-Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, initiated a program, purportedly in response to President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, to bring 100,000 low-aptitude men (some of whom were ineligible under previously existing selection standards) into the military on an annual basis. These men were "promised" a leg-up on later civilian life because of their military experience. Ironically, about half of the participants, who were disproportionately Black and lacked a high school diploma, were drafted into this social welfare program. Many went to the jungles of Vietnam as infantrymen or other combat-related jobs without a civilian counterpart. Apparently the disadvantaged had to be forced to get in on a "good deal." Clouds of disingenuousness thus hang over Project 100,000.4

All-in-all, it was impossible to ignore the outcry against the draft, so studies continued to deflect criticisms, allegations of bias, and the general sting of Congressional hearings. In 1966, two major groups were established. There was the President's National Advisory Commission on Selective Service (or the Marshall Commission, named for its chair, Burke Marshall), and Congress' Civilian Advisory Panel on Military Procurement (or the Clark panel chaired by retired General Mark Clark). Neither recommended the abolishment of the draft but instead supported a renewal of the Selective Service Act—with draft reforms.

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Despite the dismissal of a volunteer military, Congress continued to deliberate over this issue as well as to take up the topic of draft reform. After all was said and not done, the volunteer concept was dismissed on the grounds of cost, inflexibility, and the potential detrimental effects on quantity and quality. By the end of June 1967, the only reform that had been made was a suspension of non-medical or dental graduate student deferments.

Addressing draft inequities and outright opposition to conscription made for some interesting political alliances. Students, academicians, lawyers, folk singers, clergy, and members of the Black Power movement coalesced. More amazing were the bipartisan alliances. Democratic Senator George McGovern running for president on a liberal, dovish platform agreed with Republican nominee Nixon and supported a strict reliance on volunteers, whereas Republican moderate, New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller and anti-war Democratic Senator Eugene McCarthy were advocating a fair draft. Other non-presidential contenders were also taking sides. Other volunteer supporters included conservative Senator Robert Dole (R-KA); whereas draft reform minded Senators included most notably, liberal Edward Kennedy (D-MA). Republican liberals were opposed to the war and the draft, while liberal Democrats were opposed to the war but in favor of the draft. Conservative Republicans were pro-war and draft with Conservative Democrats pro-war but anti-draft. Although there was intra-party disagreement, the public positions were: a) major reform segueing into an AVF for the Republicans and; b) reformed draft maintenance for the Democrats. The Republicans, of course, won.

Thus, despite his previous support of the draft, soon after his inauguration, in the face of peak American involvement in Vietnam and the nation's increasingly visceral reaction to manpower procurement policy, Nixon was reminded of his campaign pledge and appointed the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force in March of 1969. Regardless of the fate of previous panel recommendations, yet another national study and advisory group was formed. The 15-member Commission, chaired by former Secretary of Defense (Marshall Commission alumnus and opponent of the all volunteer concept), Thomas S. Gates, blended perspectives from the military, academia, and business/finance. Those with an economics bent were certainly amply represented but champions of civil rights also added their voices. Further, in addition to university presidents and professors, this august group included a 26-year-old student—Stephen Herbits—from Georgetown University Law Center. In addition to the principals—the Commission members—there was a staff of researchers—mostly econometricians—collecting information and directing and conducting studies to guide the members' ultimate recommendations.

The proliferation of panels did not end there. While the Gates Commission was grappling with whether and when and how to go about ending the draft, the Department of Defense (DoD) embarked upon its own study. Seeing the writing on the wall and failing to be appointed head of the Gates Commission, the Pentagon wanted its own assessment of how to overcome the potential pitfalls within a volunteer environment. Dubbed Project Volunteer, DoD tackled the shorter term plans for reform and delved into the practical issues of readying the military for volunteer recruitment by examining pay and benefits, living conditions and image.
Furthermore, being the largest Service with the most at stake, the Army initiated its own effort—VOLAR (Volunteer Army)—to cope with the dissolution of the draft. Among the VOLAR recommendations was allowing soldiers to have longer sideburns, eliminating “Mickey Mouse” regulations and practices such as reveille and bed checks, reassigning the drudgery of kitchen police (KP) and rock painting to civilians, and having beer machines installed in the barracks. Though such considerations seem superficial, the message was one of deregulation of the military. Rather than wards of the draft, the Army was on the road to more gracious and adult treatment of its members.

**Transitioning to the Modern Military**

First came reform! The entrenchment of the draft, not to mention the exigencies of Vietnam, led to draft reform before phase out and ultimate elimination. Under pressure resulting from his reluctance to change the operation of Selective Service and his lack of support for the Nixon Administration's position, General Hershey "resigned" his post in 1969. Under his 1970 successor, Curtis W. Tarr, more serious reform got underway. Actually, a version of the catchy FAIR (Fair and Impartial, Random) or lottery system—with the youngest called first—that was tossed about halfheartedly during the Johnson Administration, was authorized very late in 1969. In 1970, under Tarr, the lottery was tweaked by using random numbers rather than birth dates to establish priority of call to ensure randomness—which had eluded the first lottery held in December of 1969.5

In addition to reorganizing the agency and making the lottery true to its name, deferments were curtailed, the process was automated, and calls were made uniformly, nationwide, rather than driven by local predilection. The draft, while still despised, was being redesigned to minimize disruption of life and career progress and to make the selective burden more impartial. Reforms were designed to prevent more affluent youth from permanently hiding in college, and to have more equal vulnerability to the power of the draft among those on different rungs of the economic ladder and among racial groups. Calls were reduced and Tarr headed toward a zero-draft.

The establishment of the Gates Commission and reform of Selective Service did not halt Congressional debate on the merits of the draft versus an all volunteer approach to providing military manpower. Despite the publication of the Gates Commission report in February of 1970, with its conclusion that, “We unanimously believe that the nation's interests will be better served by an all-volunteer force...,”6 elimination of the draft was not a done deal. The House and Senate questioned the elimination of student deferments and the soundness of reforms for conscientious objectors. In 1971, the expiring Selective Service Act was extended, but for only two years rather than the customary four, so as to push the Services toward volunteerism. Despite

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pessimistic prediction that the draft would never be eliminated, the increasing youth population and changing technology were logical arguments in favor of an AVF; and the debacle of Vietnam added the moral argument as well as the emotional and political impetus.

In addition to reforming the draft to make it more random and equitable, military personnel policies also underwent revision beginning in 1971. Measures were taken and programs were implemented so as to promote true volunteers. Perhaps the most crucial change advocated was the increase in economic incentives, in particular, pay raises to stimulate enlistments, not to mention the prospects for the volunteer force. The beneficiaries were to be primarily lower ranking enlisted members. Other economic additions included bonuses for hard to fill specialties such as the combat arms, increased scholarship support for the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), and an overhaul of recruitment practices. Clearly, it would have been impossible to end the draft on one day and see the requisite number of volunteers start to pour in the next.

**Objections to the All-Volunteer Force**

There was reluctance to end the draft in some camps and economic, social, and political arguments against the AVF were generated and vocalized. Cost was a big and persistent strike against abandoning the draft. Whether estimated at an additional $4 or 5 billion according to the Gates Commission or $6 to 8 billion according to those inside the Pentagon, this change in manpower procurement was going to need a bigger bankroll. Volunteers would not be willing to be "buck" privates. What's more, it would take greater recruiting expenditures to attract these more highly paid newcomers to the military.

Among the social punches thrown at complete reliance on volunteerism, was that the economic incentives used as the key to ending conscription were tantamount to luring the poor to their deaths. And, in another variation on this theme, many turned their noses and sniffed at the thought of mercenary soldiers rather than patriots defending the nation.

Another loosely articulated social argument in favor of the draft centered around its socialization function. The military had comportment value and, without the draft to cycle people in and out of service, American men would lose this valuable opportunity to have instilled in them patriotism and discipline, or so the case was made. A related retort against the AVF had it that without the citizen participation ensured by the draft, there would be a change in military attitudes and the new professional military would pose a threat to civilian authority.

Furthermore, there were grave reservations about the quality of military personnel without a draft. Hands were wringing in anticipation of cadres of poorly educated and low ability troops. There were claims that representation would be out of sync with population proportions—with the force becoming too Black, too poor, as well as unqualified. Some were

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7 "Buck private" is a colloquial term often used to refer to the lowest ranking enlisted man. It is believed to have originated during World War I when the pay for such soldiers equated to one dollar (a buck) a day.
nervous that a high Black count would deter Whites from enlisting. Without the draft, it was feared that high quality young men would have no motivation to enlist and there would be no way to press them into service—a calling that suffered from low prestige. Quality has been measured via standings on the entrance test—the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT). This test has been administered in various forms since 1950 and today comprises four subtests devoted to assessing verbal and math ability (i.e., word knowledge, paragraph comprehension, arithmetic reasoning, and mathematics knowledge). The nagging notion was that there would be a dearth of enlisted members in the upper end of the AFQT distribution—Categories I-IIIA—and a concomitant overabundance of those scoring below average—Categories IIIB and IV.8

Politically, the all-volunteer force was feared to have a negative impact on foreign policy. The notion was that without the draft, our foes would judge the U.S. as weak, thus increasing the threat of war. Opponents of the AVF questioned whether we would be able to assure NATO that we could still honor our international commitments and fight the lingering Cold War. References were made to the April 1947-June 1948 dabble with volunteer recruitment that ended in failure and succumbed to a reinstitution of the draft.

Woven throughout this hodgepodge of arguments was the fact that the draft had served to stimulate enlistment and support the reserves and otherwise could be counted on to provide a formidable, diversified, large standing force at a relatively low cost. In contrast, the AVF was seen as inflexible. Perhaps the base sentiment, though unexpressed, was fear of the unknown. Military leaders, politicians, bureaucrats, and the general public were used to the draft and would be left floundering without it. The draft had become tradition, thus there was opposition to its elimination.

Objections to the Draft

It wasn't so much that there was support for the volunteer force as that there were growing and insurmountable problems with procurement via draft. Together, the objections to the AVF or to the draft read like a script for Goldilocks of "The Three Bears" fame—to too expensive, too unfair, too risky—except that neither was just right. Other "alternatives" such as national service, or universal military training weren't really seriously considered but summarily dismissed. After all, they were more costly or inefficient than even an AVF.

The arguments against the draft were mainly philosophical arrows launched against the AVF nay-sayers. With its inequities exposed, ending the draft was seen as the right thing to do. Because manpower requirements paled in comparison to the populous baby boom generation, military service became a selective burden—causing a disruption in lives not to mention risk of death or injury. In the delicate balance between freedom and responsibility, the draft accomplished neither. Coercion is anathema to our free society. Besides, an undesired stint of service did not necessarily make one a better citizen and certainly there were qualms on this side.

8 There is yet another AFQT category—V—denoting those who score below the 10th percentile relative to the normative base population. Those who score in Category V are ineligible to enter the military.
of the debate about entrusting defense to conscripts and reluctant volunteers.  Fears of a professional volunteer force were countered by the fact that volunteers have been the backbone of the military even when under a conscription-based system. Furthermore, national opinion survey results countered with findings that occupation/income, education, age, race, location, and the like were more significant shapers of attitudes than veteran status. And, it was pointed out, after Vietnam there would have been fewer conscripts anyway because of lesser manpower requirements and the policy of filling slots first with volunteers.9

Historically, inductions accounted for only 30 percent of enlisted manpower. The remaining enlisted men were split evenly between true volunteers and those who were motivated to enlist because of the presence of the draft. Not only did such figuring fly in the face of the notion of the drafted citizen soldier but it spoke to the ability of an AVF to draw personnel. The character of the military was not expected to change because only junior enlisted personnel, and not all of them, were drafted. Senior enlisted members and officers have always been volunteers. It is interesting to note that whereas the name of the last draftee—Dwight Elliott Stone—has become a bit of military manpower trivia, the name of the first "all" volunteer is not singled out. Freely enlisting in the military was nothing new to the AVF.

Perhaps the most central argument against the draft was that it was a "tax in kind." Eminent economists explained that whereas the draft appeared cheaper than a volunteer force with its added bonuses and sizeable pay increases for junior enlisted personnel, in reality the draft was more expensive than it looked at face value. The draft forced conscripts into low paying jobs exacting a tax "in kind" if not in cash, while their luckier contemporaries were in the more lucrative civilian labor market adding to their wallets and the tax base. Furthermore, substandard wages and disruption of one's life plans was no way to improve morale. There was no turning back; draft or no draft, it wasn't right to keep pay so low.

Foreign policy objections to the draft also were raised. Whereas the AVF was thought to signal weakness, the draft was seen as a war magnet—it made military intervention too easy. More specifically, continuation of the draft, it was said, would enable the government to more easily pursue actions that did not pose an immediate threat to our nation's survival. In short, it was reasoned that we would more easily go to war because we could—there was an endless supply of warriors.

The Draft Becomes History

The Gates Commission succeeded where other panels of pundits failed. Recognizing bureaucracy's inertia or, more palatably, its resistance to change, the Commission sought to provide a unanimous recommendation; there was no room for doubt. After all the arguments were raised and hotly debated and after careful research and recommendations, the economic

underpinnings and the AVF itself was passed by Congress. However, Congress did not adhere to the Gates Commission timetable. Instead of rescinding induction authority in 1971, DoD's 1973 option was picked up. The draft was given a stay of execution to give the military a little experience under a zero-draft. To guard against foot dragging, the stay was granted for two years only—not indefinitely.

As stated above, draft calls not only abated (the last was in December 1972, just a month before the signing of the Vietnam peace agreement) but induction authority ran out on July 1, 1973. Skepticism about the volunteer experiment did not cease with the phase-out of the draft. Concern was greatest for maintaining a steady supply of enlisted members—the numerical backbone of the force. Rumor and talk of doom and gloom flourished in the face of the uncertainty of the volunteer recruiting environment. Changes were needed and were beginning to be made. Between 1970 and 1973, the number of recruiters was increased by 65 percent. These new recruiters were out in the field selling service instead of taking orders. And the product they were selling—a term of service—was being repackaged. In addition to the lures of pay, bonuses, and educational incentives, entering recruits (or accessions) were given greater latitude in choosing their military jobs. Furthermore, the military image was given a "make-over," as hair and sideburns length regulations were relaxed, Nikes and Adidas replaced steel tipped combat boots during boot camp daily exercise sessions and more importantly, housing and other conditions were improved. It still wasn't the Boy Scouts, but the military's harder edges were softened a bit and Uncle Sam’s paternalism was evolving into more of a partnership.

Other recruiting related embellishments included adjusting aptitude and education level entry standards and requirements to the prevailing market, instituting selective reenlistment bonuses, eliminating the two year enlistment option (in 1975), and opening up the Services' doors to both the enlisted ranks and the officer corps to women. Without the aid of conscription, enlistment standards could not be set too high or else it would be tough to meet numerical objectives. On the other hand, very low standards, necessary to ensure draft fairness, could be eschewed in favor of greater selectivity. The problem was finding the right rock bottom minimums and setting higher objectives or operational standards as conditions permitted. After getting the requisite number and quality of people in uniform, it was necessary to keep a good portion of them there for a second term and beyond, hence there was a greater emphasis on reenlistment in the AVF. Similarly, whereas a two-year stint was a maximum for conscripts, it wasn't long enough for the more highly paid and trained volunteers.

In addition to the standards and retention approaches to meeting quantity and quality goals, the enlistment of women was quite an unexpected blessing. The increased participation of women was overlooked by the Gates Commission. Held to a maximum of 2 percent of the active duty force before the AVF, women climbed to 5 percent of new recruits in 1973, hit the double

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digits at 12.3 percent for the first time in 1978, and in FY 1998 just over 18 percent of non-prior service enlisted accessions were women. The increased participation of women in the AVF has brought their active duty tallies to almost 165,000 or 14.1 percent of active component enlisted members as of the end of FY 1998. Gender integration has become most pronounced within the Air Force, which could boast that over 26 percent of its new 1998 recruits and 18 percent of its active duty members were women.

Marketing and advertising together with research and applications would become a mainstay for building and maintaining the volunteer force. The Army began its campaign of paid radio and television ads in 1971. The Gilbert Youth Surveys were conducted during the transition from the draft and beginning in 1975, the annual Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) was begun to pulse knowledge of enlistment offerings, awareness of recruiting and advertising, and attitudes toward enlistment in the military. Marketing savvy has matured, evolving from posters affixed to public buildings proclaiming “Uncle Sam Wants You” to jingles like “Be All That You Can Be” aired on the Monday night football game and even during the Super Bowl. Uncle Sam is looking a little kinder and more generous these days carrying his message about the ability to earn money for college for volunteering for enlistment instead of pointing a finger of doom. The extensiveness of military marketing is highlighted by the DoD Student Testing Program through which a version of the enlistment aptitude test is administered free of charge to accepting high schools and community colleges nationwide. This recruiting tool allows the Services to bring their message along with a career counseling tool as recruiters press the flesh with soon-to-be graduates in search of employment opportunities. In addition to money for school, enlistment-aged youth are sold on career opportunities with civilian application, a high tech environment, good preparation for adulthood, and an honorable profession in which they can take pride.

Problems and Solutions

Despite the planning and forethought, launching the AVF had its fair share of problems and false starts. Failure was predicted when it had barely begun. In keeping with warnings that a peacetime force may be depicted as idle, irresponsible, and unmotivated,12 in 1973, an unsigned editorial in The Los Angeles Times declared that “the volunteer approach clearly has failed, and...it must be replaced by a system that will assure adequate manpower of necessary quality.”13 In its report published in 1976, a new Congressional commission created on November 16, 1973, raised concerns over the costs of military manpower and the failure to achieve a functioning Total Force policy. Further, this Defense Manpower Commission warned that the AVF would not hold in an emergency. Similarly, Curtis Tarr stated his belief that if mobilization were required, the draft would be back. There was much talk of recruiting shortfalls (in 1976, the Army and Marine Corps actually missed their numerical objectives), a dearth of quality


personnel, and a hollow force. Force planners would learn that it took more than economics to successfully recruit and manage a volunteer force.

The hand wringing and visions of the writing on the wall for the AFV were fueled by some notorious manpower fiascoes that occurred early on. First there was the Private McClure affair. In 1975, the Marine Corps—the Service with the lowest numerical requirements—signed up McClure in Austin, Texas and in so doing committed a recruiting faux pas if not downright malpractice. He had tried to enlist a month earlier in Lufkin, Texas but was found unqualified with an AFQT percentile score of 7—some 93 percent of the youth population could be expected to outscore him. (Mr. McClure had been rejected by the Air Force and the Army, as well.) A psychometric miracle occurred when he retook the test for the fourth time—he scored 59. Not only did his score belie his behavior, but his history of institutionalization for mental problems and his repeated brushes with the law escaped scrutiny. How? Well, as the Beatles once said—"I get by with a little help from my friends." A "friendly" goal conscious recruiter had helped Mr. McClure on his way to becoming Private McClure. In addition to the probable coaching on the test or other such compromise (perhaps even a ringer to take the test) inquiries regarding McClure's background left many stones unturned in keeping with the ever popular bureaucratic axiom: "never ask a question you can't stand the answer to."

Given his "true" background—including the 20-year old high school drop out's purported mental retardation, it should have come as no surprise (had it been known) that Private McClure had problems adjusting to the Corps. He was assigned to a disciplinary or motivational (motto) platoon and "encouraged" via pugil stick exercises. That is, fellow Marines engaged in short but repeated simulated bayonet fighting bouts using a "pugil" stick—a 12-pound, four foot long stick padded at both ends. However, instead of motivating a recalcitrant above-average aptitude recruit, the Marine Corps had inadvertently killed a mentally retarded man with no business of being there in the first place, no matter how pressured recruiting service was to meet goal. McClure's motto drill instructor was cleared of manslaughter charges brought in a Court Martial trial, but the motivational unit was disbanded and a specter hung over the Marine Corps, including its recruiters. From that point on, the Marine Corps vowed to suffer manpower shortages rather than come up short on quality and image.

Later there was another affront to quality within the All Volunteer Force. In 1976—on the first of January to be exact, a new Joint-Service selection and classification test battery—

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16 There were subsequent allegations of recruiter malpractice. For example, articles in The San Antonio Light and the San Antonio Express dated May 20, 1976 stated that a former Marine recruit had given a sworn affidavit that a recruiter gave him the answers to the test and arranged for someone to take a high school equivalency exam in his stead.
17 For additional details on this incident see J.E. Revell, “The McClure Affair” The Times Magazine (December 13, 1976), pp. 6-18.
Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)\(^{18}\)—was implemented. In a rush to field the cognitive instrument, the scoring algorithm for interpreting applicants' test performance was seriously flawed. That is, scores were artificially inflated; interpreted as indicative of a higher percentile standing relative to the national manpower pool than was actually the case. The misscoring of the ASVAB, or ASVAB Misnorming\(^{19}\) as it has come to be called, lasted until 30 September 1980 and resulted in the enlistment of over 400,000 or 25 percent low ability—Category IV—recruits. Though the Misnorming can rightly be attributed to faulty psychometrics, less than honest motives have been attributed to Defense for its occurrence. When it was finally announced at the time of President Jimmy Carter's request for reinstatement of draft registration, skeptics claimed either that the Misnorming was a plot to keep the weak AVF afloat or that it was a scheme to return to conscription.

After 1980, quality began to soar. Many factors, including the Pentagon's marketing and advertising experience, contributed to this continuing phenomenon. Perhaps more important than the aid of a weak economy, lifting the cap on the enlistment of women and allowing them to march into the ranks and command attention within the officer corps in increasing numbers (entering the prestigious Academies for the first time in 1976) contributed not only to the quantity of the forces but to the quality as well. This is because the military's demand for women pales in comparison to the supply, thus the growing few who enter are indeed select.

There has been an increased reliance on careerists, or persons serving beyond the initial term of service, in the volunteer forces. Within the enlisted ranks, members served an average of 5.8 years on active duty as of 1973. Among those on active duty in FY 1998, the mean time in service was 7.5 years.\(^{20}\) Compared to draft era statistics for conscripts and reluctant volunteers, personnel turnover rates under the AVF have declined from 26 percent in the late 1960s and early 1970s to around 15 percent since the late 1980s.\(^{21}\) Greater experience levels on the part of modern volunteers is also seen in the rising proportions of accessions who make it through not only a longer first term, but a follow-on second term. Only 9 and 10 percent of FY 1971 and FY 1972 accessions, respectively, made it to the eight-year point in contrast to 18 percent of accessions since the late 1980s.\(^{22}\)

Another related trend is the increasing family support of the AVF. Under the draft the military was primarily a singles' organization, but increasingly, AVF military members have family ties. The Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force employs and deploys husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, dual military couples, and single parents as well as single young men

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\(^{18}\) The ASVAB comprises 10 subtests that are combined into various composites and used for selection as well as job classification purposes. Four subtests constitute the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) composite used as a primary entry hurdle and quality benchmark measure.

\(^{19}\) For more details on the ASVAB Misnorming see Laurence & Ramsberger, *Low Aptitude Men*.


\(^{21}\) Personnel turnover rates for the draft era are reported in Martin Binkin, *America’s Volunteer Military: Progress and Prospects*, (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1984); the latter figure was derived from accession and end strength statistics in Department of Defense, *Population Representation*, 1999.

\(^{22}\) Based on survival rates obtained from the Defense Manpower Data Center, Monterey, CA.
and women. Although very few new recruits or officers are married when they enter service, the presence of spouses and children within the Defense fold is common among more seasoned personnel. Within just the active component (newcomers and careerists alike), over half (53 percent) of enlisted personnel have a spouse as do in about three-quarters (71 percent) of officers. Over half (54 percent or so) of all enlisted personnel have children as do about 61 percent of officers. The majority of military members' children are below school age with over 2 million dependents under the age of 5.24 A scattered few are responsible for adult dependents as well. Though there are often conflicting demands for commitment on the member posed by the military and the family, longer terms and more mature membership associated with the modern volunteer force have coupled these two "greedy"25 institutions. Certainly, families are a complicating factor in the readiness equation, but the military's increasing family orientation is not necessarily a liability. Married members have fewer discipline and behavior problems and higher retention rates than their single peers.26

One part of the solution to recruitment and retention of military families (including its single members) has been increasing emphasis on "quality of life" components including not only pay and allowances but housing, child care, family advocacy, and morale, welfare, and recreation programs.27 These personnel elements were and are monitored and studied along with the more traditional manpower issues so as to effect more responsive and responsible policies and practices to bolster not only recruiting but retention and readiness.

The Services have learned that to keep its soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen, it is important to meet more than their physical needs; that is, it takes more than “three hots and a cot.” Quality of life programs, including health care, child care facilities, support systems especially during periods of family separation, tuition assistance for off-duty education, a commitment to equal opportunity, and transition support are vital for retention and hence readiness for deployment. Attention to retention and separation can ease recruiting either by garnering positive perceptions on the part of would be recruits or lessening the accession demand.

By 1983, at the AVF’s 10-year mark, Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger canceled the alert and declared the volunteer experiment to be over. Yet, criticism and skepticism as well as flat out misperceptions regarding the characteristics of military personnel remain. For example, at the same celebratory conference at the conclusion of which Secretary Weinberger

23 These figures were derived from The 1992 Surveys of Officers and Enlisted Personnel and Their Spouses, Defense Manpower Data Center, Arlington, VA.
judged the volunteer force to be a success, a show of hands found that many manpower analysts in the audience were wary about its continuation and indicated that the draft would return. In 1987, Eugene McCarthy declared that “[t]he Department of Defense has not been able to attract enough capable and qualified persons...”

The results of a 1990 survey of employers found them to have “inaccurate perceptions about the educational level, the skills and abilities possessed by veterans, and in general, the experience, opportunities, and credentials of veterans.”

Others may have more positive perceptions of the modern day military yet do not seem to embrace its new image and feel nostalgia for the draft. Military sociologists have lamented that the volunteer military has become more of an occupation vice an institution and wonder what became of the citizen soldier. Even as volunteers were fighting and winning the Gulf War, there were newfound advocates of conscription—to balance the force.

Several arguments, facts, and factors address or otherwise dispel the skepticism, misperceptions, rumor, innuendo, and disrepute that continue to plague the AVF. First, the draft hasn’t been needed for the last 25 or so years. This period was far from idle but included a major deployment to the Middle East in 1990 for Operation Desert Shield that turned into the war known as Desert Storm. And this was not the only test of the AVF’s mettle. There were many earlier combat missions and operations other than war including peacekeeping in the Sinai and Lebanon, smaller-scale operations in Grenada and Panama, and counterdrug operations here and abroad. Post-Desert Storm roles have included maintaining a forward-deployed presence in and around Kuwait and Saudi Arabia as well as elsewhere overseas, a deployment to Haiti, taking part in United Nations’ peacekeeping efforts in Bosnia, lending a hand for humanitarian assistance in Somalia and Rwanda, and keeping a watchful eye on North Korea to prevent nuclear proliferation. And the list goes on. In fact, except for 1981, our volunteers have been involved in combat operations to some extent every year since 1980 with at least some servicemembers having been killed in the line of duty each year since 1983. Indeed the Operating and Personnel tempos (OPTEMPO and PERSTEMPO) have been quick. The "peacetime" force has been effective in peace, war, other-than-war, and other-than-peace and other-than-war. Again and again, they have demonstrated their patriotism and commitment, protected our nation's interests and honored our international commitments. They expect to be treated fairly as they train and deploy and they have certainly served honorably under military leadership and civilian authority.

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Status and Issues Today

Today’s force is almost 1.4 million active and 870,000 selected reserve members strong. It is smaller than pre-AVF force levels (e.g., highs of 3.5 million in 1953 and 1969) and even down from pre-drawdown (circa 1988) numbers of 2.1 million and 1.2 million for the active and reserve components, respectively. However, today's uniformed personnel remain diverse, qualified, ready, and busy. And the smaller force levels are not a function of AVF recruiting failure, but are in part attributable to the fine performance of America's volunteers (with a little help from a dismantled Soviet Union and Eastern European Bloc).

Today’s members are not all Black and not all poor. They are not under-educated and not below par in terms of cognitive ability. As of FY 1998, 22 percent of enlisted members and 8 percent of officers on active duty were Black. Though enlisted accessions tend not to come from families in the top quarter of the socioeconomic status distribution, when viewed from the vantage point of parental education, employment status, occupation, and home ownership, new recruits can be said to be very middle class. About 96 percent of incoming recruits had high school diplomas and 67 percent scored in the top half of the AFQT distribution. Although this latter figure is down from record 70-plus percent levels throughout most of the 1990s, it is still impressive. Quality was almost as high among brand new selected reservists. The college-educated are not missing from the military. Most notably, officers are college graduates—with Service Academies and Reserve Officer Training Corps scholarship recipients, in particular, competitive with any Ivy League collegian. Complete readiness is perhaps not achievable but today's force is more ready than its drafted predecessor for the missions likely to occur. And whereas the Reserves received practically no call to Vietnam, under the current Total Force policy, the reserves can expect to be and have been called upon to deploy beside their active duty compatriots. The Reserves are clearly citizen soldiers, present and accounted for in the rank and file.

Volunteer recruiting has prevailed despite predictions that the force would suffer in terms of quality, representativeness, and the like. The characteristics of the standing force have exceeded even optimistic predictions of those who pushed for the AVF. For example, Gates Commission researchers estimated that at least 67 percent of volunteers would be high school diploma graduates. This figure was in keeping with or exceeded percentages achieved during

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Fewer than 1 percent of FY 1998 accessions had neither a traditional high school diploma nor a credential from an alternative secondary school program (e.g., adult education or high school equivalency credential).
the early 1960s and was somewhat lower than the proportions within the national population and those achieved at the height of the draft in the late 1960s. The percentage of entering high school graduates has been above 80 percent since 1982 and above 90 percent since 1984. Also not realized were the predictions regarding aptitude levels. On the basis of analyses of Project 100,000 and the changing occupational mix, the Commission concluded that the force would not be in jeopardy if as many as 25 percent of new recruits scored in the Category IV range.\(^{39}\) Aside from the period surrounding the ASVAB misnorming, quality has soared. With the exception of 1989 when the figure reached 6.4 percent, since 1986, the Services have held Category IV recruits to under 5 percent. In that same "low" year, over 64 percent of brand new accessions scored within the upper half of the aptitude distribution. These quality marks have exceeded even the Service's requirements as stated and submitted to Congress in 1985.

Blacks have exceeded Gates expectations of 14.9 percent to reach a high of 21.6 percent of accessions and about 23 percent of the active enlisted component in Fiscal Year 1989. But, even with such high minority military participation, Operation Desert Storm is a testament that Blacks have not borne a disproportionate share of the fighting and dying under the AVF. Not long ago, the Chairman of the House Committee on Armed Services agreed when he stated that after "some considerable time on this [issue, the Committee] came to a rather surprising conclusion about it. It's not true."\(^{40}\) Of the 375 deaths suffered by the United States in the Gulf War, 63 or 16.8 percent were Blacks.\(^{41}\) And, whereas the proportion of Blacks in service has been relatively high, data on socioeconomic status counters the notion that AVF recruits are economic conscripts.

Among today's personnel issues are policies regarding the assignment of women and the inclusion of homosexuals. Though women have gained ground—numerically and occupationally—they remain barred from ground combat.\(^{42}\) As women board ships and aircraft headed for combat and are increasingly exposed to risks on the ground as well (e.g., 10 percent of Army deployments for Operation Desert Storm were women),\(^{43}\) the issue and degree of gender-integration has been reopened for debate and action.\(^{44}\) Likewise, policies regarding gays in the military are likely to be revisited. Personnel policies tend to exclude groups like women or gays from the benefits of service because of potential threats to cohesion yet, when the going gets rough (e.g., when demand seems stronger than supply) are more likely to be blind to characteristics such as gender and sexual orientation.

\(^{39}\) Ibid.
\(^{41}\) Binkin, *Who Will Fight the Next War?*
\(^{42}\) A direct ground combat rule—restricting women from direct combat on the ground—replaced the more restrictive Risk Rule as of October 1, 1994. At the same time the Services were directed to open more specialties and assignments to women, including duty aboard aircraft and ships engaged in combat missions.
\(^{43}\) See Binkin, *Who Will Fight the Next War?*
Certainly the new millennium brought obstacles to military recruiting and personnel management. Bombarded by a vibrant economy with record low unemployment levels as well as increasing college enrollment rates, the Army and Navy fell short of their FY 1999 recruitment goals. The other Services reached their goals, but not without trepidation. In fact, the Air Force finally joined its fellow Services and launched its own television advertising campaign in 1999. Of course, retention goes hand-in-hand with recruiting. The pace of deployments and the erosion of benefits (perceived and actual) have shaken commitment to the profession of arms. Contrary to simplistic notions of conservation of matter, a smaller military is not necessarily easier and cheaper to fill and maintain. The downsized military may not be the “right” size.

The smaller, successful force must not become complacent or it could suffer the consequences of organizational irrelevance. Certainly it is not irrelevant to social scientists intrigued by this institution. The real concern is that it becomes irrelevant to youth and their parents. In 1968, there were over 27 million veterans in American society. They made up around 13 percent of the total population, 23 percent of the adult population, and 47 percent of the adult male population. As a whole, the modern volunteer military has taken in about 20 percent of young men (in contrast to the 47 percent figure for 1968)—an appreciable but declining segment of our youth population. Filling the smaller ranks is a challenge today as interest in joining is slipping. The likelihood that young men would consider enlisting—so-called propensity—in the active component is down from pre-drawdown levels. The trend is especially notable among Black youth. A suggested reason for enlistment's loss of luster includes the perception that the military is no longer hiring—a variant on the organizational irrelevance theme. Furthermore, those members displaced by the drawdown may feel a loss of faith in the institution that could precipitate a further lowered regard for the profession of arms. Given the continued risks faced by men and women in uniform and the ever increasing need and demand for quality, it would be prudent to heed the warnings and counter the effects of declining propensity, personnel turbulence and dissatisfaction. It is issues like these, perhaps more so than an occupational emphasis brought about by modernization and technological sophistication that could fundamentally change the character of the military institution.

All-in-all, as it faces current challenges, the AVF seems to be anchored in solid ground. The firm footing has been influenced, no doubt, by the many storms that it has weathered, including early recruiting shortages, lapses in competitive pay, the inadvertent admission of volumes of low aptitude recruits, the quantity and quality decline in the national youth population, competition from colleges and national service programs, not to mention back-to-

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46 See Goldich, "American Society and the military."

47 Wilson & Horack "Military experience."

back missions and deployments—and real combat experiences. Perhaps the military is at another
crossroads or transition point. Just as it had to learn to manage a large standing force without the
help of the draft, now it must adjust to a smaller force in being but one that must interact in a
multinational environment and respond to a multitude of missions. And Defense must recruit
and maintain its force in the face of fierce competition from institutions of higher education and
the civilian labor market.

The All-Volunteer Force Tomorrow

At the AVF's ten-year mark, there was doubt about its continuation. A decade later,
when a similar commemoration was convened again in Annapolis, the tone was more optimistic
with speakers carrying a recurrent theme of celebration. If a show of hands as to the fate of the
AVF were requested today, would the result be a vote of confidence or no confidence?
Remember that the forces have been filled by volunteers, and only volunteers, for some 25 plus
years. Against today’s OPTEMPO and labor market competition, the need for conscription has
been pondered. But imagine the outcry over its effects! No doubt, conscripts would lower
quality statistics. Draftees would lower the quality of the force by upping the Category IV count.
Another argument against a draft reprisal involves potential threats to equal opportunity. Would
Blacks suffer and be denied the same high level of access to the profession of arms as under
volunteer terms? Would homosexuals be included among the draft-eligible? And, would
Congress even suggest that military pay should be cut to indentured servitude levels? The point
is, that just as the draft was a tradition since 1940 until its elimination, the AVF is now firmly
entrenched and draft reinstatement would be contentious at best. It might “solve” the quantity
problem but would present problems involving quality and equity to be sure.

The Defense manpower community—researchers and policymakers—have a tendency to
whine and wring their hands over any change in the recruiting horizon. If it’s not the decline in
the prime recruitment pool, it’s the increase. For though the pool has been replenished
numerically, there has been great angst over the changing demographics and high college
attendance rates of today's youth population. There are and will be issues to address and
problems to face, but, with a quarter of a century behind the AVF, it seems premature to throw in
the towel. This is not to say that there is no room for change. For example, changes are being
considered for the promotion system that has not as yet responded to the contingencies of
modern volunteerism. Promotion is still based upon a draft environment, which favors youth (so
as to mitigate career disruption) and precludes lateral entry. Economics is still a key ingredient
for the AVF’s continued success. And just as it was time to consider paying junior enlisted
personnel a competitive wage, it may be time to pay skilled technicians according what they're
worth and not necessarily the same as others who entered service at the same time. New
recruiting approaches and targets must be explored.

What about a formidable presence to our foes? Rumor has it that the Russians are
coming again—coming over to volunteerism, that is. In October of 1995, a front page headline
in The Washington Post read: "Russia's Young Men Fleeing Draft in Droves." It seems that
there is a growing draft evasion market in Russia fueled by social strife, meager quality of life for the armed forces, and an unpopular war to name a few of the debilitating conditions. Would-be soldiers are boning up on deferment qualifications and medical disqualifications. In addition to receiving draft evasion tutoring, for a price, corrupt local draft board members may be the ticket to avoidance through an illegal deferment.49 Some of the countries of the former Soviet Bloc are not only deterred by our volunteers but they are finding out how to shape and maintain a volunteer force of their own.

Misperceptions, false impressions, and anecdotes remain. Commentators and critics often fail to see that challenges and obstacles to readiness are not unique to the AVF. Perhaps that is good. If the military continues to make “good” copy, it may escape the fate of social irrelevance. Continued scrutiny is essential for tomorrow’s smaller, but increasingly diverse, community-based, and forward-deployed total force. Marketing, recruiting, advertising, incentives, training, and quality-of-life will remain important and those that serve—men and women, minority and majority members alike—in good part because of economic and educational opportunities, will continue to fight nobly for their country. The AVF will confront hurdles and must therefore evolve but not “devolve” or stagnate. Retreating to conscription is shortsighted and maintaining the status quo is risky. Building the All-Volunteer Force was no simple task. And maintaining military quality and readiness will take dedication and resources—not a lottery.