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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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DEFENSE DIVISION

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The Honorable
The Secretary of Defense

Dear Mr. Secretary:

In our letter of January 29, 1971, we informed you that the General Accounting Office had scheduled a review of the management of Department of Defense (DOD) periodicals. As a part of this review, we obtained information on the policies, procedures, and practices of DOD and the military services in approving, monitoring, and distributing periodicals. We also obtained certain information on 291 individual periodicals published within DOD from questionnaires prepared and distributed at our request through the normal command channels of each of the military services.

Based on preliminary data obtained, we began a detailed review to assess the effectiveness of the management controls over these publications. However, on October 6, 1971, Mr. John C. Broger, the Director, Office of Information for the Armed Forces, informed us that his office planned to make a study of these and other periodicals. We met with him on October 20, 1971, to exchange information and to coordinate our efforts.

As a result of that meeting, we agreed to suspend our review (code 85224) pending completion of the DOD study. We furnished to Mr. Broger certain information and analyses we had already developed, as well as our observations on matters we believe warrant particular attention. Our observations are summarized below for your information.

--Procedures regarding the approval of proposed new periodicals vary considerably among the three services. Depending on the type of periodical proposed, it may be approved at the department level, by a field commander, or by a unit commander. The criteria furnished the many officials authorized to approve new periodicals are very broad or not adequate to ensure that new publications are necessary and not duplicative of the purposes and subject matter of existing periodicals.

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- Apparently because of the widespread authority for approval of periodicals, we could identify no control point, either within the DOD or the military services, responsible for controlling the many periodicals being published. As far as we could determine there is no comprehensive information at any level either on the total number and the cost of periodicals published, or on the number of military and civilian personnel engaged in this activity.

- Once approved, there appears to be no effective control over changes significantly increasing the cost of a periodical. We noted that periodicals underwent extensive changes, particularly in the use made of coated paper and color and in the number of pages. Various DOD officials said that changes of this type generally are made to motivate the reader. We were also told that there are no instructions or guidelines other than the Joint Committee on Printing (JCP) regulations, limiting the extent to which periodicals may be made more elaborate to attract readers. Based on the limited data we obtained, it appears possible that uncoordinated changes by the military services making periodicals more attractive may have violated the JCP regulations which prohibit such changes primarily for decorative effect.

- The military services have not established adequate procedures for periodically assessing the continuing need for approved periodicals. Once approved, the Navy and the Air Force require no further review or approval. The Army has a reapproval requirement, but only for servicewide publications controlled by the Adjutant General. The Air Force has an annual reapproval requirement for all periodicals; however, the reapproval authority rests with the responsible commands without any evidence of adequate coordination among commands. We believe the differences in reapproval practices of the services and the apparent lack of coordination for reapproving periodicals, dealing in many instances with the same subject matter, indicate a need for DOD to establish adequate procedures to reasonably ensure that unnecessary costs are not incurred to reach the same target groups with different periodicals.

- Based on limited tests, there seems to be a need for more effective control over the number of copies printed and their distribution. Generally, we found no effective means in use to determine reader interest or the size of the target groups at military facilities. Further, it appeared that once an activity is placed on a distribution list to receive a specified number of copies, there is no effective provision for follow-up in later years to determine whether the activity's needs have changed. Limited inquiries within one service showed that some activities were receiving excess copies, others were receiving insufficient copies.

As agreed with Mr. Broger, we will be provided copies both of drafts and the final report on the DOD study, so that we may evaluate the study and any actions taken or planned, particularly regarding the matters discussed herein.

We appreciate the excellent cooperation by Mr. Broger in assisting us initially and in coordinating his study with us to avoid duplication of effort. We believe this illustrates how our respective staffs can be used most effectively to achieve mutual objectives.

Copies of this letter are being sent to the Secretaries of the military departments for their information.

Sincerely yours,

for R. M. Lutmann
Director
Defense Division

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