



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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FEDERAL PERSONNEL AND
COMPENSATION DIVISION

B-208812

SEPTEMBER 29, 1982

The Honorable Verne Orr
The Secretary of the Air Force



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Attention: Assistant Auditor General

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Subject: Air Force Efforts To Reduce Student
Backlogs (GAO/FPCD-82-72)

During fiscal year 1981, Air Force enlisted personnel waited an average 9.03 training days after completing in-processing (orientation) to begin their technical training. Backlogs delay recruits' skill development and cost the Air Force an estimated \$11.4 million in fiscal year 1981.

Although there are many causes of student backlogs, the one most commonly cited by Air Force officials was the disparity between the number of personnel recruited during peak recruiting months and the number of seats available in technical training classes. Due to the improved recruiting environment for fiscal year 1982, however, the Air Force is now attempting to match the number of personnel enlisted in the Air Force's delayed entry program 1/ with available class seats for fiscal year 1983. The Air Force also plans to recruit personnel during fiscal year 1983 on a more balanced basis.

We support the Air Force's efforts and believe that it has made progress in matching personnel to available class seats. However, this is only a temporary remedy made possible by the improved recruiting environment. We are concerned that substantial backlogs will reoccur in the mid-1980s to late 1980s if (1) the Air Force expands its force size, (2) the economic and civilian employment outlooks improve, and (3) the pool of eligible

1/In its delayed entry program, the Air Force enlists personnel, but delays their actual reporting dates for active duty by up to 12 months.

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recruits declines. We believe, and Air Training Command (ATC) officials agree, that the Air Force will likely be forced to revert to seasonal recruiting, which will result in mismatches between the number of recruits and available technical training seats. Therefore, the Air Force should not view the current situation as a long-term solution to its student backlog problem.

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Our objectives were to determine the approximate costs of the backlogs and what actions the Air Force is taking to reduce backlogs. We reviewed fiscal year 1981 data to obtain a full-year's average backlog, because backlogs vary from month to month and are affected by seasonal factors.

We did work at Headquarters, Air Training and Recruiting Commands, in San Antonio, Texas, and at Lowry Air Force Base (AFB) in Denver, Colorado, where one of the Air Force's six technical training centers is located. This review, conducted from January to June 1982, was made in accordance with our Office's current "Standards for Audit of Governmental Organizations, Programs, Activities, and Functions."

To obtain an understanding of the extent and causes of student backlogs, we interviewed various command-level and program personnel and reviewed numerous documents and regulations on technical skill training, management of students, recruiting, and the selection of recruits to attend the various technical training classes. We also reviewed and summarized weekly backlog reports for all Air Force technical training centers and obtained estimates from ATC officials of average student waiting time. We developed cost estimates using grade E-2 cost data provided by Air Force comptroller personnel. We discussed our findings with ATC program officials and considered their views in completing this report.

BACKGROUND

ATC is the major provider of technical skill training for Air Force enlisted personnel. After completing basic training, most recruits are assigned to one of ATC's six technical training centers, where they receive instruction leading to qualification in an Air Force specialty.

ATC is responsible for managing the flow of students from basic training through technical training. Upon arrival at a technical training center, students generally undergo 3 days of technical and administrative in-processing. After completing in-processing, students either start their technical training or must wait until a class seat is available. While awaiting

training, students are available and are assigned to perform miscellaneous duties and work details on the base.

Each training center is responsible for all students daily until they graduate and must account for the number of students in class, the number not in class, and the reasons they are not in class.

BACKLOGS ARE COSTLY

Historically, Air Force recruits have had to wait at training centers before beginning their technical training. From fiscal years 1970 through 1981, the average daily student backlog ^{1/} ranged from a high of 2,816 to a low of 1,467. (See enc. I.) During fiscal year 1981, the average daily student backlog ^{1/} was 2,345. ATC estimates that students waited an average ^{9.03} training days before beginning their technical training and that the total staffdays spent waiting was about 388,000 for the fiscal year.

In addition to delaying recruits' skill development, backlogs are costly. Using an average daily cost for a grade E-2 enlistee of \$29.50, which includes both salary and other personnel-related costs, we estimated the cost of the fiscal year 1981 backlog of 388,000 staffdays at \$11.4 million.

SEASONAL RECRUITING VARIATIONS MOST OFTEN IDENTIFIED AS CAUSE OF BACKLOGS

Many factors can cause student backlogs. However, the factor most commonly cited by ATC officials as affecting student backlogs was seasonal recruiting variations, coupled with a technical training program that schedules training classes evenly throughout the year. Although ATC officials could not say how much each factor has contributed to student backlogs, they identified the following factors as contributors: (1) changing personnel requirements, (2) delays in class starts caused by unexpected factors at the technical training centers, (3) unexpected student delays, and (4) capacity limitations in basic military training.

With voluntary military service, increasing force size, and the goal of filling all its personnel needs, the Air Force, during fiscal year 1981 and in earlier years, decided to recruit

^{1/}Includes students who were completing in-processing requirements and awaiting training.

personnel primarily when they were available. As a result, the number of recruits varied throughout the year. For example, more personnel were recruited in the months following high school graduations than at any other times during the fiscal year. (See enc. II.)

As cited by ATC officials, however, this variation alone does not cause backlogs. In scheduling its technical training classes, the Air Force uses an "even-flow" concept to create a smooth flow of students through technical training throughout the year. While this approach perhaps makes scheduling technical training easier, it provides little flexibility in the technical training program to allow the centers to handle peak student loads. The result is that most times more students are recruited during peak recruiting months than the technical training centers are able to enroll in class. In effect, the Air Force has placed primary emphasis on filling its total personnel needs by recruiting personnel when they are available and has not developed a training program that can respond to personnel surges.

AIR FORCE IS ATTEMPTING TO MATCH
THE NUMBER OF RECRUITS WITH AVAILABLE
CLASS SEATS FOR FISCAL YEAR 1983

Due to improvements in total military compensation and benefits and due to the poor economic and employment conditions during fiscal years 1981 and 1982, the Air Force has found it easier to recruit personnel than in the past. Because it expects the improved recruiting trend to continue, the Air Force is matching the number of recruits with available technical training class seats for fiscal year 1983. If successful, this approach should reduce the number of days students have to wait before beginning training.

ATC officials indicated that while they believe this approach is achievable, the Air Force will again likely be forced to return to some degree of seasonal recruiting in the future. ATC officials anticipate that the combination of an expanding force size, an improved economic and employment outlook, and a declining pool of 18- to 22-year-old eligible recruits will make recruiting even more difficult than before.

CONCLUSIONS

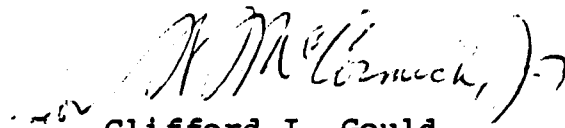
The recent decisions by the Air Force to (1) modify its recruiting approach to match the number of recruits with available technical training class seats and (2) recruit personnel during fiscal year 1983 on a more balanced basis should reduce the student backlog for fiscal year 1983. However, this is only a temporary remedy made possible by the improved recruiting environment. We believe that backlogs will likely return to historic

levels if the Air Force is forced to return to seasonal recruiting. The Air Force should not view the current situation as a long-term solution to its student backlog problem.

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We are sending copies of this report to the Chairmen, Senate and House Committees on Armed Services and on Appropriations; Director, Office of Management and Budget; and Secretary of Defense.

Sincerely yours,


Clifford I. Gould
Director

Enclosures - 2

AVERAGE DAILY STUDENT BACKLOGBY TECHNICAL TRAINING CENTER (note a)

<u>Training center</u>	<u>FY 70</u>	<u>FY 71</u>	<u>FY 72</u>	<u>FY 73</u>	<u>FY 74</u>	<u>FY 75</u>	<u>FY 76</u>	<u>FY 77</u>	<u>FY 78</u>	<u>FY 79</u>	<u>FY 80</u>	<u>FY 81</u>
Chanute AFB	605	474	326	401	506	N/A	395	486	366	386	620	418
Keesler AFB	328	438	369	327	251	N/A	251	233	289	391	516	557
Lowry AFB	503	320	149	276	184	N/A	327	365	349	272	278	446
Sheppard AFB	641	690	408	485	411	N/A	410	404	456	476	526	560
Lackland AFB	239	158	215	220	160	N/A	328	124	539	533	246	341
Goodfellow AFB	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	18	59	23
Total	<u>2,816</u>	<u>2,080</u>	<u>1,467</u>	<u>1,709</u>	<u>1,512</u>	<u>1,987</u>	<u>1,711</u>	<u>1,612</u>	<u>1,999</u>	<u>2,076</u>	<u>2,245</u>	<u>2,345</u>

a/Includes students who were completing in-processing requirements and those awaiting training.

AIR FORCE SEASONAL RECRUITING VARIATIONS

FISCAL YEAR 1981

