

November 1989

# AIR FORCE PILOTS

## Need for Pilots in Selected Non-Flying Staff Positions



**National Security and  
International Affairs Division****B-229213****November 24, 1989****The Honorable John Glenn  
Chairman, Subcommittee on  
Manpower and Personnel  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate****Dear Mr. Chairman:**

This report responds to your interest in the number of Air Force pilots that are assigned to non-flying staff positions. Data in our June 1988 report<sup>1</sup> show that about one-fourth, or 5,400, of the 23,300 Air Force pilot requirements were for non-flying jobs. In reporting on the fiscal year 1989 National Defense Authorization Act, the conferees urged that the Department of Defense (DOD) critically evaluate its management of the aviator inventory and scrutinize the validity of requirements, especially for non-flying positions. They cautioned that authorized positions could be reduced if not adequately justified on a position-by-position basis and that requirements should be analytically addressed in the comprehensive report on aviators due to the House and Senate Committees on Armed Services on December 1, 1988. On November 28, 1988, DOD issued its report.<sup>2</sup> You were concerned that DOD did not adequately justify the need for so many non-operational flying positions.

As agreed with your office, we reviewed the Air Force's efforts to validate rated staff<sup>3</sup> requirements and a sample of the Air Force's Form 480s, which were used to document about 2,300 of the non-flying staff positions. The Form 480 is to clearly describe the position's duties and the specific type of rated expertise that is needed. We reviewed these documents in assessing the need for pilots in some non-flying positions in Air Force Headquarters and in the Tactical Air Command, Langley Air Force Base, Virginia.

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**Results in Brief**

In June 1988 the Air Force initiated a review to critically examine each rated staff requirement and validate the absolute minimum number of pilots and navigators in staff positions. However, DOD agencies and

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<sup>1</sup>Air Force Pilots: U.S. Air Force Requirements, Inventory, and Related Data (GAO/NSIAD-88-163, June 1, 1988).

<sup>2</sup>Department of Defense Aviator Retention Study, November 28, 1988.

<sup>3</sup>Pilots, navigators, and weapon system officers in the grades of lieutenant through lieutenant colonel.

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Air Force commands lacked specific criteria for the review and were given a limited time to complete this task. Air Force officials agreed that the desired results of this review were not fully achieved and stated that efforts to examine rated requirements are continuing.

In our sample of Form 480s, we found that some justifications do not clearly describe the required rated expertise (e.g., whether a pilot or a navigator is required) and that some appear to describe the responsibilities of the work center rather than the responsibilities of the rated individuals. Overall, we identified some procedural weaknesses and/or inconsistencies in the process that indicate a need to reflect Air Force pilot requirements more accurately. Some indicate a potential to reduce pilot requirements. However, we are not making recommendations because the Air Force is continuing to study rated management issues.

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## Air Force Review

The Air Force has actively pursued ways to reduce rated requirements and improve its management of these requirements. For example, Air Force policy limits rated staff/overhead increases to force structure growth. Officials also have been seeking ways to convert rated positions to non-rated. In continuing its efforts, the Air Force, in June 1988, initiated an effort to document the rated management process, review rated requirements, and identify major problem areas and specific issues requiring action. As part of this review, all Air Force commands and DOD agencies with Air Force rated staff officers conducted what was referred to as a "zero-based review" of these requirements. This review was to revalidate most authorized staff positions.

The Air Force provided the commands and agencies with a reporting format but not detailed criteria for evaluating the need for requirements. The commands and agencies were required to report within 20 days. Some commands indicated that staff requirements were thoroughly reviewed, but others indicated less-than-desired results. For example, officials in one command expressed full support for the objectives to review rated staff and validate the absolute minimum level of rated positions, but they said that the current review, because of its limited time frame and lack of definitive ground rules, would likely reflect the existing rated staff requirements. They also said that if a more in-depth review is undertaken, the Air Force needs to provide specific criteria to challenge and justify rated staff positions and allow a longer review period. They said that these actions would increase the quality of input.

The review identified a total of 106 potential position reductions, including 52 in the Military Airlift Command and 25 in the Strategic Air Command. Most of these reductions are anticipated conversions to the operations management career field established in January 1985. The operations management field is designed so that non-rated officers handle operations and training functions that have traditionally been done by rated staff, such as command post, airfield management, and base operations. Air Force officials said that conversions will occur as trained personnel become available.

Even though some reductions were identified, Air Force Headquarters officials agreed that the desired results of the review were not fully achieved. Air Force officials said the purpose of a conference of command representatives in January 1989 was to initiate another Air Force-wide review of rated requirements. This review is scheduled to be completed by the end of calendar year 1989.

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## **Rated Requirements Validation**

The Air Force's Form 480 is to be used to document certain rated requirements, including about 2,300 non-flying staff positions. Air Force guidance provides that the Form 480 is to be validated only if it clearly describes why rated expertise is required to accomplish a given job. The Form 480 consists of one page that lists the position title, the command and organization in which the position is located, and the Air Force specialty code (AFSC) that identifies the specific type of rated expertise the incumbent should have. The Form 480 is also to include a brief position description, including the rationale for requiring that the incumbent be a pilot or a navigator, the amount of rated expertise needed, and the size of the work center in which the position is located.

In our sample of Form 480s, we found that some justifications do not clearly describe why the rated expertise of a pilot, as opposed to the expertise of a navigator, is needed. For example, some justifications describe the responsibilities of the work centers in which the positions are located rather than the duties of the rated individuals. One work center had six rated positions, each justified by a Form 480. Of the six Form 480s, four listed pilot specialty codes and a grade of lieutenant colonel, and two listed navigator specialty codes and a grade of major. However, each position had the same title, "Regional Security Policy and Country Desk Action Officer," and identical descriptions and rationale for a rated officer. The descriptions for pilot positions did not differ from those for navigator positions.

In another work center, 4 of the 10 officers were rated with each rated officer's position being supported by a Form 480. However, the justification on each Form 480 describes the division's responsibilities by specifying that the division acts on national security objectives, defense policy and guidance, national military strategy, force planning, and Joint Strategic Planning documents. It lists a number of other division responsibilities and concludes with a statement that rated expertise is essential to ensure that force planning and strategy reflect the realities of air operations. The description appears to justify a need for some rated expertise, but it does not specifically justify whether a pilot's or navigator's rated expertise is required.

## Potential for Reducing Pilot Requirements

Although the Air Force considers each of the Form 480s we examined to be a valid justification for a pilot, it had also determined that other officers could perform the duties associated with some of these positions without jeopardizing the Air Force's mission. For example, 11 of 68 staff positions at Air Force Headquarters and 7 of 75 staff positions at Tactical Air Command Headquarters were filled or could have been filled by rated officers other than pilots (navigators or weapon system officers). Air Force Headquarters had 10 positions that were dual coded so that either pilots or navigators could fill the positions; 9 of these positions were filled by pilots, and 1 was vacant. An additional Form 480 was coded for a pilot, but the written justification said either a pilot or a navigator would have the experience to fill the position.

To the extent that rated officers other than pilots can perform the duties associated with these positions, Air Force pilot requirements can potentially be reduced. Reducing requirements is important because training a pilot costs more than training other rated officers. Training a pilot can cost from \$5 million to over \$7 million. Also, the Air Force is projecting a significant shortage of pilots.

Air Force officials indicated that dual codes will no longer be allowed and will be eliminated during their next annual review of Form 480s. In commenting on this report, DOD stated that "... the presence of a navigator in a pilot position does not necessarily indicate that the pilot requirement is not valid, but frequently is a transient circumstance of supply and demand."

On the basis of interviews with incumbents in 24 positions at Tactical Air Command Headquarters and a review of documents, we identified 7 positions coded for pilots for which other officers could perform the

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duties. Two of these positions were filled by weapon system officers, one was to be converted to a weapon system officer, and one was to be converted to require a non-rated officer. In addition, pilot incumbents in three other positions said that rated officers other than pilots could perform the duties of their positions.

In a similar example, a 23-person work center only had 2 rated positions (1 pilot and 1 navigator), both with identical titles and job descriptions. The only difference was one slight wording change: the last sentence in the justification of the navigator position begins, "Rated AFSC is mandatory," whereas the last sentence of the justification for the pilot position begins, "Pilot AFSC is mandatory." The July 1988 Air Force review identified the navigator position as one to be considered for conversion to the operations management career field.

A further potential for reducing pilot requirements was indicated by some administrative problems that could overstate requirements. For example, one command had requested its field units to provide additional data on 41 positions for which the command questioned the accuracy of the AFSCs associated with the positions. Even though the command officials did not anticipate substantial changes to the total number of rated positions, they saw some possible specialty code adjustments to more accurately reflect requirements. Also, 19 of the 68 Air Force Headquarters positions that we reviewed were reported as being vacant when we requested information on the incumbents in the positions. However, further investigation by the Air Force revealed that only 4 of the 19 positions were vacant. Air Force officials said these 15 positions were incorrectly reported as being vacant because some navigators filling pilot authorizations were not listed in the database as filling the positions, some position conversions were not updated in all databases, some errors resulted from administrative oversight, and some positions filled by reserve officers were not listed as being staffed. Revised and strengthened administrative procedures would help preclude the possibility of overstated requirements, which could result from positions being listed as vacant when staffed by qualified rated personnel.

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## Conclusion

Although our review indicated that Air Force pilot requirements could potentially be reduced, we are not making recommendations because the Air Force is continuing to study rated management issues, focusing specifically on pilot requirements.

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## Agency Comments

DOD concurred with this report. (See app. I.) It provided explanatory and other technical comments that we have included in the report as appropriate.

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## Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Our objectives were to review the Air Force requirements validation effort and assess the justifications prepared by the Air Force for assigning pilots to non-flying positions. We reviewed copies of the agencies' and commands' responses to the Air Force's request for a zero-based review of rated requirements. We also randomly sampled Air Force's Form 480s at Air Force Headquarters, Washington, D.C., and the Tactical Air Command Headquarters, Langley Air Force Base, Virginia. Our samples included 68 of the 238 positions at Air Force Headquarters and 75 of the 352 positions at the Tactical Air Command.

For each position, we reviewed the written justification of pilot expertise. We also reviewed other relevant management documents and studies, including the DOD report on pilot retention. We interviewed Air Force officials as well as pilots serving in some of the positions.

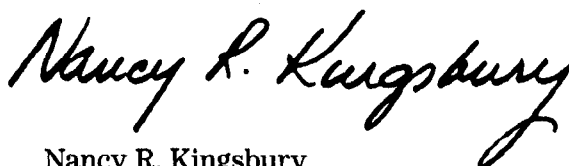
We conducted our review between January and June 1989 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

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We are sending copies of this report to the Chairmen, Subcommittees on Defense, House and Senate Committees on Appropriations; the Chairmen, House and Senate Committees on Armed Services; the Secretaries of Defense and the Air Force; the Director, Office of Management and Budget; and other interested parties.

GAO staff members who made major contributions to this report are listed in appendix II.

Sincerely yours,



Nancy R. Kingsbury  
Director, Air Force Issues

# Comments From the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management and Personnel



**FORCE MANAGEMENT  
AND PERSONNEL**

THE OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

12 OCT 1989

Mr. Frank Conahan  
Assistant Comptroller General  
National Security and International  
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U.S. General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Conahan:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the General Accounting Office (GAO) draft report, "AIR FORCE PILOTS: Need for Pilots in Selected Non-Flying Staff Positions," September 7, 1989 (GAO Code 392449/OSD Case 8116).

The DoD has reviewed the report, and concurs. Technical corrections were provided to your staff on September 20, 1989.

The Air Force is continuing its review of the use of the Air Force Form 480, and is committed to maintaining an excellent rated requirements structure. It should be noted that the presence of a navigator in a pilot position does not necessarily indicate that the pilot requirement is not valid, but frequently is a transient circumstance of supply and demand.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to review the report in draft form.

Sincerely,

*David J. Berteau*  
David J. Berteau

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense  
(Resource Management & Support)



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