

GAO

Briefing Report to the Honorable
Lloyd Bentsen, U.S. Senate

September 1988

PRISON BOOT CAMPS

Too Early to Measure Effectiveness



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United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

General Government Division

B-231283

September 9, 1988

The Honorable Lloyd Bentsen
United States Senate

Dear Senator Bentsen:

On November 6, 1987, you requested that we study military-style boot camp prisons being operated in several states as an alternative to traditional prisons. Boot camp prisons, often described as "shock incarceration," generally provide a highly regimented program involving strict discipline, physical training, hard labor, and some drill and ceremony, resembling aspects of military basic training.

Seven states were operating boot camps at the end of 1987. Boot camp objectives include offsetting prison overcrowding, reducing prison costs, and reducing recidivism. You were particularly interested in whether boot camps accomplish these objectives and whether they should be used in the Federal Prison System. As requested, this report summarizes the findings we provided your office in briefings on May 6 and July 13, 1988.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

The state boot camp programs are relatively new, and it is too early to tell whether they will offset prison overcrowding, reduce prison costs, or reduce recidivism. About 1,200 federal prisoners admitted to federal prisons in 1986 met general criteria used for admission to the seven state boot camp programs. However, Federal Prison System officials have not yet endorsed boot camp programs for federal prisoners. The Justice Department and at least three states have ongoing or planned studies and evaluations scheduled for completion in the next few years that should provide more information for making decisions about the effectiveness of boot camps and their appropriateness for federal offenders.

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

To obtain the requested information on the use and advantages of boot camp programs, we principally interviewed and reviewed documentation available from officials in the Justice Department's Federal Prison System and National

Institute of Justice and state correctional officials from Florida and Georgia. We visited the Florida and Georgia boot camps. We also compared the records of federal offenders sent to prison during fiscal year 1986 with criteria typically used for admitting offenders to boot camps. Our objectives, scope, and methodology are discussed in more detail in appendix I.

WHERE BOOT CAMPS ARE
AND HOW THEY OPERATE

As of December 1987, seven states operated boot camps, and an additional five states--Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, and North Carolina--were developing boot camp programs. Georgia and Oklahoma established camps in 1983, and Mississippi began its camp in 1985. Florida, Louisiana, New York, and South Carolina began their camps in 1987.

Although there are no generally accepted standards within the correctional community for the operation of boot camps, most state programs have restricted them to impressionable, young adult felons who are not hardened criminals. Also, states have required that prisoners must volunteer to participate in the programs. A National Institute of Justice funded study of boot camps (see p. 7), which should be issued around September 1988, defined boot camps as programs that

- provide a short period of imprisonment followed by community supervision;
- recruit predominantly young adult offenders who have not been in prison before; and
- provide a highly regimented program involving strict discipline, drill and ceremony, and physical training that resemble some aspects of military basic training.

Boot camp operations vary among states. In Georgia, for example, judges sentence offenders to boot camps subject to the offenders agreeing to participate. If the offenders fail to participate or do not meet the camp criteria, they will be returned to the judge for a new sentence. In Florida, judges sentence offenders to prison, and correctional officials, with the judges' approval, select from those volunteering for the program. Program length, among the seven states, runs from 90 days in Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina to 180 days in New York. Five of the seven states require hard physical labor, such as clearing land, digging ditches, or draining swamps in addition to institution maintenance and housekeeping activities. All the

states provide some education, and all but one provide some counseling programs.

In all seven states, prisoners who successfully complete the boot camp return to the community under some form of probation. Those who fail to complete the camp or who violate the terms of their probation are sent to a regular prison or returned to the judge for resentencing.

The number of prisoners in boot camps is small when compared with the total prison population of the respective states. For example, in Georgia, which has two boot camps, total boot camp capacity at any point in time is 200 prisoners compared to a state prison population of about 18,500 as of July 29, 1988.

Appendix II contains additional descriptive information on the Florida and Georgia boot camps--the two states whose boot camps we visited. To provide some perspective on what goes on in a boot camp, a typical day's schedule for the Florida boot camp is presented in appendix III.

AVAILABLE DATA ARE NOT SUFFICIENT
TO MEASURE BOOT CAMP SUCCESS

The National Institute of Justice draft study and our visits to boot camps in Georgia and Florida revealed that available data are not sufficient to determine if boot camps reduce prison overcrowding, costs, or recidivism. The lack of evidence appears to be a result, principally, of the relatively short period of time that most boot camps have been operating and the lack of boot camp cost data compared to other prison costs.

Boot camps may reduce prison overcrowding and prison costs if they involve offenders who would have otherwise been sent to prison, the offenders are incarcerated for a shorter time, and they are not readmitted to prison after their release at a greater rate than prisoners sentenced to regular prisons. However, the possibility that boot camp programs could involve higher operating costs and the possibility that some offenders sent to boot camps would have been put on probation if they had not been sent to boot camps would affect any potential savings.

In Florida, corrections officials select prisoners for boot camps who have already been sentenced to traditional prisons, and available Florida statistics indicate that the time served in boot camps is about 12 months shorter than the time the camp participants would have otherwise served in prison. However, in Georgia, judges can sentence offenders to boot

camps as part of their probation sentence. According to the National Institute of Justice draft study, some officials said that in Georgia and Mississippi many offenders sentenced to boot camps would have been on probation had the camps not existed, and the program likely was increasing rather than reducing prison populations.

Another cost implication is the daily cost of housing prisoners in boot camps compared to traditional prisons. According to the National Institute of Justice draft study, many state correction officials believe that the boot camp daily costs are as much as, or more than, traditional imprisonment because some boot camps may provide closer supervision and have a higher staff/inmate ratio than other prisons. In both Florida and Georgia, officials estimated that their boot camps cost the same as regular prisons. Actual data on boot camp costs were not available in either state since cost data for boot camps and traditional prisons are commingled.

Concerning the recidivism reduction goal, the theory is that boot camp prisoners will not commit additional crimes after release because (1) the boot camp experience will make them want to avoid serving further time in prison, and/or (2) because they will obtain enhanced capabilities for living a law abiding life as a result of the self-esteem or educational experiences gained from successfully completing the boot camp. Because most boot camps have been operating for only a short while, their success in reducing recidivism is not clear.

The National Institute of Justice draft study suggested that based on data from two states (Georgia and Oklahoma) where some tracking had occurred, camp graduates, at best, return to prison at about the same rate as offenders released from other programs. As of July 1988, Georgia officials had developed data on recidivism for the 270 offenders who completed the boot camp program between January 1984 and March 1985. That data showed that 39 percent of the graduates had returned to prison within 3 years of release from the camp. That rate was about the same as the 38 percent rate overall for offenders released from other Georgia prisons during the same period. Georgia officials said that more data, including comparisons with similar offenders released from other prisons, are needed to determine the effectiveness of boot camps in reducing recidivism.

EFFORTS TO DEVELOP BETTER DATA ON
BOOT CAMP ROLE AND EFFECTIVENESS

Several studies are underway or planned on the role and effectiveness of boot camps. The studies involve both federal and state funding. For example, Florida and Georgia officials told us that they are studying their boot camp operations. New York, according to the National Institute of Justice draft study, is also making an evaluation. The National Institute of Justice is funding an evaluation of Louisiana's boot camp, and officials from the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Assistance said they plan to provide grants to four different boot camp programs to track offenders upon release and to facilitate program evaluations.

When available over the next few years, these studies should provide more information on the advantages and disadvantages of boot camps and assist those who make decisions about their use. In the interim, the National Institute of Justice draft study advises caution in moving ahead with boot camps and suggests, among other things, that state officials who are considering implementing a boot camp consider what goals are sought and how they will be achieved and, once the camps are established, make rigorous evaluations of camp operations and impact.

APPLICABILITY OF BOOT CAMPS
TO FEDERAL PRISONERS

The Federal Prison System is not using the boot camp alternative for federal offenders. According to Federal Prison System officials, boot camps have limited utility because the camps' targeted population differs from the federal population and because there is not enough information available to be certain boot camps work.

As stated earlier, it is too early to determine if boot camps work; however, using a U.S. Sentencing Commission database on sentenced federal offenders, we estimate that 1,224 federal offenders sent to prisons in 1986 met the typical criteria--under 25 years of age, no previous adult incarcerations, and convicted of a nonviolent crime--that states use in identifying boot camp candidates. Under the new federal sentencing guidelines, which became effective in November 1987, less use will be made of probation and more offenders will be sent to federal prisons. Thus, the number of federal offenders meeting the general criteria for boot camps likely will increase.

There are factors, however, which could reduce the pool of federal inmates available for boot camps. For example, all seven states require voluntary participation, and six states require that the inmate have no physical impairment. The National Institute of Justice draft study noted that about half of the New York offenders considered for boot camp refused to participate. The researcher, who is doing an evaluation of the Louisiana boot camp, estimated that 30 percent of the Louisiana offenders either would not volunteer or could not pass the medical screening.

Moreover, the federal sentencing guidelines do not include provisions for boot camps as, in effect, an alternative to longer prison sentences. According to the Sentencing Commission's research director, either the guidelines would have to be amended or the judges would have to justify going outside the guidelines each time they sentenced an offender to boot camp.

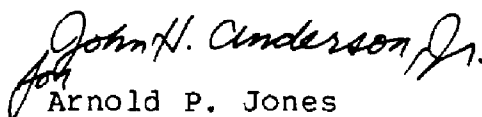
Federal Prison System officials said many of the boot camp candidates would also be candidates for other programs they are now operating, such as halfway houses, and programs they are considering, such as forestry work camps.

We discussed this report with Federal Prison System and National Institute of Justice officials. They generally agreed with the information presented.

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As arranged with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the date of this report. At that time, we will send copies to the Federal Prison System, National Institute of Justice, Florida and Georgia state officials, and other interested parties. If you have any questions regarding this report, please call me on (202) 275-8389.

Sincerely yours,


Arnold P. Jones
Senior Associate Director

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Our objectives were to obtain information on (1) the operation of boot camps; (2) their usefulness in reducing prison overcrowding, costs, and recidivism; and (3) their potential use for federal prisoners. To get this information, we reviewed various literature on boot camps and interviewed

- officials in the Justice Department's Federal Prison System, National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, and National Institute of Corrections;
- the former director of the Federal Prison System; and
- officials from the United States Sentencing Commission, the Department of Defense, and the American Correctional Association.

We visited boot camps in Florida and Georgia, interviewed officials of those camps and other Florida and Georgia prison system officials and examined various program guidance and other descriptive material provided by Florida and Georgia officials. We also examined documentation on boot camp research done or planned by the two states and Justice's National Institute of Justice and Bureau of Justice Assistance.

As agreed with your office, we limited our state contacts to Florida and Georgia since a national survey of boot camp use had already been made by a National Institute of Justice contractor. Among other things, that study (entitled "Shock Incarceration: An Assessment of Existing Programs") addressed boot camp purposes, locations, operations, and available information on their advantages and disadvantages. It was designed to provide information and suggestions that would aid officials in making decisions about using boot camps. The information for the study was obtained from, among other things, a review of relevant literature; a telephone survey of all 50 state corrections departments, further telephone conversations with directors of existing boot camp programs; and visits to the programs operated by Georgia, Mississippi, New York, and Oklahoma. The study was made principally during the latter months of 1987. National Institute of Justice officials told us that the report should be issued around September 1988 and that, while changes could occur, they did not expect any significant differences between the draft we reviewed and the final report.

To provide additional perspective on whether boot camps could be used in the Federal Prison System, we compared the records of federal offenders sentenced to prison during fiscal year 1986 to

principal criteria used by the seven states for admitting state offenders to boot camps. The criteria included (1) no prior adult incarceration (used by seven states), (2) conviction involved a nonviolent offense (used by five states), and (3) under 25 years of age--the age requirement varied among the seven states ranging from none (two states) to 25 (one state). We determined the criteria based on information provided by officials from the National Institute of Justice, the Federal Prison System, and the states of Florida and Georgia. The information on federal prisoners was obtained from a database maintained by the Sentencing Commission on federal offenders. This database included information from the Federal Probation Service Sentencing and Supervision Information System, which was maintained by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, and additional information collected by the Sentencing Commission, the U.S. Parole Commission, and the Federal Prison System. The Sentencing Commission has done reliability and logic assessments on this database that we reviewed as part of our report Sentencing Guidelines: Potential Impact on the Federal Criminal Justice System (GAO/GGD-87-111, Sep. 10, 1987).

We did our work during March 1988 through July 1988 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. The views of responsible Department of Justice officials were sought during the course of our work and are incorporated where appropriate.

INFORMATION ON FLORIDA AND GEORGIA BOOT CAMPS

(AS OF MARCH 1988)

<u>CAMP DATA</u>	<u>FLORIDA</u>	<u>GEORGIA</u>
Number of camps:		
Actual	One	Two
Additional planned	Two	One
Camp started	Oct. 1987	Dec. 1983 Mar. 1985
Camp capacity	100	100 each
Facility type	--all camps are medium-- security and adjoin and share some common facilities (e.g., mess area) with a regular state prison	
Living units	Single cells	Single/ double cells
Program length	90-120 days	90 days
Program components:		
Physical training	Yes	Yes
Drill and ceremony	Yes	Yes
Work	Yes	Yes
Counseling	Yes-substance abuse, group therapy	No
Education	Job seeking skills, health	Health
Number of inmates who had:		
Participated in camp	190	2,400
Completed camp	143	2,160
Percent	75%	90%
Who makes initial selection of potential camp participants	Judge sends to prison, corrections officials select	Judge sends to camp as part of a probation sentence

Camp admission criteria	Age under 25	Age 17-25
	-----Male-----	-----
	-----Voluntary-----	-----
	--No physical impairment--	-----
	-----No prior adult-----	-----
	incarceration	-----
 Average age of camp participants	 19	 20
 Typical crime committed by camp participants:		
Property	65%	69%
Drugs	21%	13%

TYPICAL DAILY SCHEDULE-FLORIDA BOOT CAMP

<u>Hours</u>	<u>Activity</u>
0400-0420	Wake up/prepare for barracks inspection
0420-0430	Personal inspection
0430-0530	Physical training (barracks being inspected)
0545-0625	Breakfast
0625-0635	Flag ceremony/reveille
0635-0655	Repair/fix barracks inspection deficiencies
0700-1100	Drill/counseling/obstacle course
1100-1140	Lunch
1140-1150	Head count
1200-1600	Work detail
1600-1640	Dinner
1640-1730	Drill and ceremony
1730-1745	Flag ceremony/retreat
1745-1845	Extra physical training/clean up detail
1845-2000	Uniform and barracks preparation
2000-2030	Sick call
2030-2100	Quiet time/study time
2100	Head count/lights out

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