

Why They're Going

The pilot shortage cover piece, focused almost entirely on fighters, presents a one-dimensional view of the reasons pilots leave the active force to fly for the airlines [*"Pilot Shortage," August, p. 36*]. By interviewing the people who, although nominally in charge, apparently have no plan to address the issue other than throwing money at it or extending Active Duty service commitment, you overlooked interviewing the pilots to get their perspective.

A real-life example, albeit not from the fighter community:

An Air Force airdrop-qualified instructor pilot, chosen as part of a competitively selected program designated as Phoenix Reach to cross train from C-17s into KC-135s, where he is also an IP, a Daedalian award winner with over 100 combat missions, on the major's list, goes on leave for 10 days. When he returns, he is informed that he has been nominated as a nonvolunteer for a program that will spend a year training him in an Arabic language, followed by a year in either Pakistan or Afghanistan, return to a Stateside assignment for a year, followed by another year in either Pakistan or Afghanistan. This program is a nonflying billet.

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As it turns out, if he is one of the 48 Air Force personnel chosen for this nonflying, thankless assignment, his ADSC will have been completed, and he will probably leave Active Duty, fly for the airlines, and transfer to the Air Force Guard or Reserve. Poor management at the top levels creates such situations. After spending millions to train a pilot in two different airframes, the Air Force, by even considering that option, sends a clear signal to the entire corps, and it's not a positive one.

Col. Robert I. Recker Jr.,
USAFR (Ret.)
Travelers Rest, S.C.

Let me start by telling you who I am. I am an 80-year-old retired Air Force recruiter. And I am responding to the pilot shortage. The last eight years of my 23 years, I was an Air Force recruiter. I started recruiting in Albany, N.Y. Because of my background, I volunteered to teach at the recruiting school in Texas. I was then assigned to the Bronx, N.Y., and finished my Air Force career as a recruiter supervisor in Boston. The pilot shortage is going to fall on the field recruiters. Now, if I were a recruiter supervisor today, I would do the following:

I would have all the recruiting cars, including mine, wrapped with current advertising. This can be done very easily. When I was a recruiter I noticed many recruiters didn't want people to know what they were doing with a government car at home. Now it is time to be seen.

I would assign my recruiters to identify all the airports in their area, the smallest to the largest. Then I would have them visit each one to get familiar with them and see what kinds of pilots get their training there and also to meet with the flight instructors.

An Air Force C-17 can land on a 3,500-foot runway. So I would schedule

a C-17 to fly into many of the airports. I would set up groups to come and see the plane. Now, I can understand why some of the visitors would say, "I don't want to fly a large truck, I want to fly a fast fighter." Inside the C-17 would be a new F-35 for them to see, and for the helicopter guys I would have one of our latest helicopters.

Now this is in addition to the college recruiting visits we have been doing for years. And I would make sure that my recruiters visited the Civil Air Patrol and other groups that have an interest in aviation.

My motto would be: "It's balls to the wall, guys. The Air Force needs pilots and we are going to find them."

MSgt. Bob Eldridge,
USAF (Ret.)
Woodstock, Ga.

Article 5

Thanks for the very well-written article "Inventing NATO" by Mr. Correll [*August, p. 62*]. It was especially interesting to read the details of NATO's creation, and for those who might think NATO is irrelevant, perhaps this article will help them understand why it is so important that we continue to support that organization even with the

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unbalanced price we Americans pay. I was assigned to AIRCENT (NATO Air Forces Central Europe) as the senior US logistician, 1996-99, and saw many places and things most Americans are unaware of that convince me of the need to support NATO.

We had 16 NATO nations at the time, and I witnessed the addition of the Poles and Czechs, in addition to others since. Each nation assigned to AIRCENT sponsored an annual social event, and I specifically remember the Canadian reception. The senior Canadian, a colonel, was speaking from the podium after dinner and jokingly questioned the application of Article 5 (an attack on one nation is an attack on all) all the way across the Atlantic to Canada, should the need arise. We all laughed at his comments at the time.

Fast forward to 9/11/2001, and I was on my last assignment to Tinker Air Force Base when we found out that NATO was sending five AWACS aircraft to Tinker. The reason was that most of our own AWACS, based at Tinker, were scattered all around the globe. NATO indeed did invoke Article 5 and did come across the Atlantic to our aid, as stated at the very end of Correll's article. NATO flew cover for us during those tense months following 9/11. This is the part that really needs emphasis, because I believe 99 percent of the American public have no clue that NATO came to America's aid.

No matter what price we are paying, one only needs to consider the consequences if we abandon NATO. I firmly believe NATO is the glue that holds our European allies together, and has done so since 1949. We cannot afford not to continue to support this crucial alliance.

Col. Frank Alfter,
USAF (Ret.)
Beavercreek, Ohio

Music To Our Ears

As a Life Member of the Air Force Association, I receive the monthly *Air Force Magazine* and I love it. [It] keeps me updated on current issues facing the Air Force and our nation.

One of my favorite items included in the magazine is a one-page section called "Verbatim." I have finally read a quote that has hit a nerve [*Verbatim: Sour Note*, August, p. 21].

Here is the quote by Rep. Martha McSally (R-Ariz), a retired USAF colonel and A-10 pilot, as quoted in

the *Air Force Times*, June 26, 2016: "For every dollar that is spent on our bands to entertain at social functions, that's a dollar we're not spending on national security and our troops and families. ... While our communities certainly do enjoy being entertained by our military bands, they would prefer to be protected by our military."

What a crock. Can't believe this came from a retired military member, let alone a colonel. I guess when you get elected to Congress you lose all sense of what is important to our troops and citizens backing those troops.

As you may be aware, military bands provide martial music during official events, including state arrivals, military funerals, ship commissioning, and change of command and promotion ceremonies; they conduct public performances in support of military public relations and recruitment activities, such as street parades and concerts; and they provide popular music groups to entertain deployed military personnel. Most bands of the US armed forces reconfigure into combat units during wartime during which they have nonmusical responsibilities, including guarding prisoners of war and defending command centers.

The military bands do more than "play music" (although this is a most inspiring part of their mission), and we need Congress to know and understand their importance. Bands inspire our military members and make service members proud of what they are accomplishing by serving our nation.

Just wanted you to know that the words of Representative McSally are (I believe) not the thoughts of the majority of military personnel nor of the general public. When the "Star-Spangled Banner" is played, we all still get a gleam of pride in our eyes. We need our bands.

Lt. Col. David L. Naquin,
USAF (Ret.)
Gatlinburg, Tenn.

Catching Up With Fiction

The Third Offset may have finally caught up with the imagination of Capt. Dale Brown, USAF (Ret.) [*The Third Offset*, August, p. 24]. Dale is a prolific author known for such novels as *Flight of the Old Dog* and the character of Brig. Gen. Patrick McLanahan. On p. 28, Defense Secretary Carter describes the "arsenal plane" as a concept with many new long-range standoff munitions, creating a new



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Our mission is to promote a dominant United States Air Force and a strong national defense and to honor airmen and our Air Force heritage. To accomplish this, we:

Educate the public on the critical need for unmatched aerospace power and a technically superior workforce to ensure US national security.

Advocate for aerospace power and STEM education.

Support the Total Air Force family and promote aerospace education.

challenge for adversaries by mixing old and new. Imagine the EB-57 working in tandem with space assets such as the X-37. The pictures of DARPA autonomous drones and the HTV-2 on p. 27 add much capability to the mix.

Col. Victor P. Budura Jr.,
USAF (Ret.)
Huntsville, Ala.

Of Pilots and Reapers

Reference the August 2016 *Air Force Magazine* article “Reaper and the RPA Resurgence” [August, p. 52].

In the first paragraph [on p. 58] it states, “Aircrews would be able to log combat time while flying aircraft in a hostile airspace regardless of where they were controlling them from.” I hope this is just an idle and passing notion of the author’s. It would surely dilute the respect given to the combat time flown in Vietnam and previous wars if RPA pilots now can log combat flying time from a desk in the USA.

Maj. John Hurley,
USAF (Ret.)
Williamsburg, Colo.

The August issue was first rate, as always. Will Skowronski’s two excellent featured articles, “Pilot Shortage” and “Reaper and the RPA Resurgence,” were so closely interrelated it surprises me that he never proposed what I believe

to be the single most obvious and practicable solution to USAF’s growing pilot shortage and the manning challenge for the expanding RPA fleet: Re-establish warrant officer ranks in the Air Force. USAF, to my knowledge, is the only service in the free world that does not recognize this “specialty officer” as an essential and cost-effective limited-duty position. It’s time we fixed that.

I do know whereof I speak, having spent 29 years on Active Duty as an Army enlisted person (to sergeant, E-5), Army warrant officer/helicopter pilot (to CWO-2), and Air Force commissioned officer/fighter pilot (to O-5). I retired in 2000 and was recalled to Active Duty in 2009 to fly MQ-1B Predators, just one of many retirees brought back to help ease the critical shortage of pilots in the rapidly expanding combat RPA field. Here is what I learned from that final assignment:

Remotely piloted aircraft are still piloted aircraft first and ISR systems second. The absolute minimum requirement to act as an RPA pilot should be an FAA private pilot certificate with instrument rating, though a commercial pilot certificate would be much better. A cyber-war gaming superstar, no matter how adept on a computer, would be eaten alive by air traffic control in common use airspace. Computers are easier to learn than flying.

Taking qualified USAF pilots involuntarily straight from SUPT or, even worse, out of their primary weapon systems—especially fighters—to place them in the RPA career field is a tremendous waste of taxpayer money and does a huge injustice to the pilots. Most will separate as soon as they become eligible. That practice also causes much anxiety across the non-RPA pilot community (“Who’s next?”) and even diminishes USAF pilot training accessions. My own son, now a Marine Corps F-35 IP, is a perfect example. He had an AFROTC pilot slot at Florida State but elected to commission in the Marines when the Air Force began assigning new SUPT grads to RPAs. And he’s not alone. Although it might divert some high-caliber talent to the other services, USAF’s failure to effectively manage its RPA pilot shortage is hurting the Air Force across the board.

RPA pilots need expertise, experience, and authority. Lower-ranking pilots need strong supervision. As a squadron supervisor (and later commanding the 426th ERS at NAS Sigonella during OUP/Libya in 2011), I found that most lieutenants had some difficulty dealing with combat solutions that most captains and majors with the same or even less RPA experience did not. I can’t even imagine the challenge of riding herd on seven or eight enlisted pilots under those same combat situations. Furthermore, I am convinced that any pilot who makes the decision to pull the trigger that will send some soul to kingdom come needs to be an officer.

The solution is a warrant officer corps. A decade from now the Air Force could have a well-seasoned and sharply honed corps of warrant officer RPA aviators performing the ISR mission in lieu of expensively trained SUPT graduate commissioned officers.

That’s more detail than most of your readers or even Air Force leaders need to have. I submit this only to show how a warrant officer flight training program might be established and managed with huge benefits in morale, recruitment, and cost savings to the Air Force, along with a positive and significant impact on our national security. I hope somebody’s listening.

Lt. Col. Gary Peppers,
USAF (Ret.)
Cape Coral, Fla.

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To be Lieutenant General: Mark D. **Kelly**.

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