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THE ALL VOLUNTEER ARMY

In 1972 our country began a new military concept--the All Volunteer Army. I am sure that most of you remember the political pressure that led to this decision. We were ending the war in Vietnam, and after all the turmoil and demonstrations against the draft, this seemed the practical thing to do. By 1972, for many young men, service in the Army seemed about the worst sentence they could serve.

I remember talking to some NCOs before the step was taken, and they predicted very accurately what would happen. They also gave a very interesting insight into the draftees that they had led in combat.

The draftees in those days represented more of a cross section of our youth, despite the exemptions. NCOs noted that these young men often did not want to be in the Army, that they wanted to grow their hair long, that they sometimes were less than eager to pull details, but, and this is important, when they got orders, they carried them out. The NCOs realized that no matter how these young men may have felt about being there, they were disciplined and they were able to function as soldiers.

What these NCOs feared was that in an All Volunteer Army the soldiers would come from primarily poverty backgrounds, that they would be the drop-outs of society who were looking at the Army as their last chance to escape their environments, and that they would join the military unprepared to carry out orders--or worse, unable either to understand orders or to learn the skills that would make them good soldiers.

I wish that I could report to you that their fears were ill founded. But in fact their fears have become a reality. I think that we all must take a serious look at our Armed Forces, for something has happened to the morale, the discipline, and the effectiveness of our fighting forces.

There is a desperate need to improve our volunteer programs to attract more highly qualified young people for military service. We must also retain those who do join and prevent their leaving.

Some two years ago the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Manpower and Personnel held hearings on the status of the All Volunteer Force. I testified before that subcommittee and presented a case for the resumption of selective service registration, a case I continue to make at every opportunity. In that same hearing record is a report prepared by Jerry L. Reed for Congressman Robin Beard (known as the "Beard Report") entitled, "An Analysis and Evaluation of the United States Army." Mr. Reed documents extensively some of the major reasons for the current weakness of the All Volunteer Force, weaknesses which must be faced directly if our Armed Forces are ever to become effective again.

Enlisted personnel complained of the lack of educational opportunities, one of their major reasons for enlistment. Many said that instead of attending classes, they were ordered to routine details--what they consider a poor allocation of their time. The claim was made that recruiters misrepresented Army life, and this, too, lowered morale.

The provision of quality housing for married soldiers was a major factor affecting reenlistment, although it is recognized that the growing proportion of married soldiers bring with them problems previously not a large concern of the Army

leadership--high costs of transportation and housing, more medical facilities, and greater incidence of morale problems associated with the stresses of marriage and family. Also, the volunteer recruit, like it or not, sees himself as a more valuable commodity than his draftee counterpart. The All Volunteer Force enlistee is more assertive of his perceived rights, is a greater discipline problem, and has higher expectations of the total army experience--thus can be more disappointed--than the draftee.

Retirement and related benefits for military service are of course primary concerns across all ranks. From buck private to general officer, the Beard Report expresses unanimous support for 20-year retirement and other benefits thought to "make up for" the rigors and sacrifice of such long and devoted service. NCOs and 20-year retirement was the only reason they stayed on so long in a job which pits a man of 40 in physical competition with a strapping youngster perhaps 20 years or more his junior. These non-commissioned officers are the backbone of our recruit training. Their experience in the training and discipline and their understanding of the complexities of transforming an 18-year-old boy into a useful soldier in a short period of time is essential.

One of the main problems with the All Volunteer Force is a lack of discipline and morale. This is something that cannot be solved with sweeping legislation wrapped in billion dollar ribbons.

Many volunteers drop out of the Army without completing their hitches--more than 190,000 since 1976. As one observer concluded, "The connection is absolute: military men don't run away from discipline, they run away when there is no discipline." The message, it seems to me, is that at present soldiers see themselves much as a civilian construction worker or a bureaucrat--they are insisting in being treated as employees--not as soldiers. I cannot see General George Patton or General Douglas McArthur leading such an army.

Thus, I am very concerned about the experiment we began in 1972 when the draft ended. Since that time, the Army has been trying to make the All Volunteer Force work. I don't fault the Army for trying. That is its duty. Congress makes a decision on what kind of Army we will have and how the manpower will be provided. The Army's reaction, as it should be, is to salute, do an about-face, and set off to do the job with the tools they have been given.

What the Army was told in 1972 was that they had to get all their personnel through recruiting and that these personnel had to flesh out a 24 division force. What's more, they were told that the Army had to be not only an All Volunteer Force but a Total Force. This meant that a heavy percentage of its deployable combat and support units had to be Reserve Forces. The reason for this was that even the politicians recognized that the costs of maintaining a totally active force of the size we might need would be enormous. The Reserves cost less, so with their help a smaller active force could be maintained.

We now find that Reserves comprise 54 percent of the Army's land combat forces, 57 percent of its special forces, 65 percent of the Army Combat Engineer Battalions and 65 percent of the tactical support units.

The first obvious failure we have seen is that we can't even fill the active force. We are currently 80,000 short. This doesn't sound so bad until you realize it hides much more severe problems. The educational level of the people we are taking in creates morale and efficiency problems. The statistics on retraining and training failures are frightening when we think about the increasingly sophisticated equipment these people must handle. The recruiting figures continue to decline, and they show promise of becoming even more alarming with the declining national manpower pool of 18-year-olds in the years to come.

The reserve situation is a disaster. Reserve units lack 91,000, the National Guard 74,000, and the Individual Ready Reserve is nearly 500,000 short.

Retention problems show the results of the recruiting problems and the quality of people being taken in. Over 40 percent of active duty recruits don't complete their first enlistment and the figures are comparable for the reserve.

What will happen when we no longer have the manpower that we need? Here is an example. The Navy announced that a ship tied up in Norfolk harbor is unable to go to sea for lack of qualified personnel. Yet, on its last voyage it won awards and was called a supership.

The problem is simply that sailors with valuable experience are not reenlisting. An internal Navy study shows that the service is now 20,000 short of petty officers--the most skilled enlisted people--and will be 15,500 short in 1985 even if the ambitious goals for reenlistments in these categories are achieved. I could add many other examples of problems with the All Volunteer Force.

Political expediency tempted politicians to announce the end of induction authority for the Selective Service in 1972 and registration in 1975. The system was put in what is called Deep Standby. The unsupported reason for this was that any future conflict with a major enemy would surely be very short, and intense, leaving no time to mobilize and call up the citizenry to defend the country. I tell you that this kind of thinking is the very thing that could convince the Soviets that we are not ready to fight anything but an all-out nuclear war and it may prove a great temptation to them to engage in a drawn out conventional war. This alternative may be even more attractive to them when they can gain the political advantage of announcing that they would not be the first to resort to nuclear weapons.

The shocking fact is that if we need to mobilize for a war it will be approximately seven months before the first person brought in by our "Deep Standby" Selective Service will be ready to fight. With the intensity of even conventional modern warfare, with the shortages in the strengths of our active and Reserve forces, and with the questionable readiness of the forces we now have, seven months is too long to wait. There may not be any units for these people to join up with if they don't get there before that.

These matters have been neglected for too long. I will continue to call for registration, and I am sure that Congress will be taking a much closer look at our military preparedness. Our world position and our national pride compel us to strive for the best military in the world. You can count on me to be in the vanguard of this effort.