



THE ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCE

By Charles Moskos

One enduring consequence of the Vietnam War and America's accompanying political trauma has been the abolition of the draft. Since the "peace with honor" of January 1973, the United States has tried what it has never tried before—to maintain a worldwide military deployment without conscripts.

This effort did not stem from a "military" decision aimed at improving the nation's future capabilities vis-à-vis the Soviet Union or its clients. Essentially, the decision was political: Washington's response to growing middle-class reaction to Selective Service and the past burdens of the war itself.

Despite the qualms of many analysts in and out of the military, the all-volunteer force was endorsed by both a Republican President and a Democratic Congress. The armed services, already grappling with the racial disputes, drug problems, and insubordination of the early 1970s, had no choice but to try to make it work.

After six years, sufficient time has elapsed to permit an initial appraisal of the all-volunteer experience, and in the Pentagon and in Congress, such appraisals are now underway. Most of the ensuing Washington debate—and the headlines—have been dominated by those who see only near-total success or near-total failure. My analysis indicates that, as yet, the all-volunteer force is neither.

It is important to remember that many of the "people problems" afflicting the military today cannot simply be blamed on the "all-volunteer" concept. They also stem from changes in American manners and mores, from prosperity, from confusion over America's world role, from a preoccupation with "rights" rather than "duties," from a decline in educational standards. Given the legacy of the late 1960s and early '70s, it is surprising that the services have done as well as they have.

Let's first look at *quantity*. The most obvious result of the end of the draft has been a sharp decline in the peacetime military force level:

¶ In 1964, just before the Vietnam build-up, the active duty strength of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines was about 2,600,000 men and women; about 191,000 or almost 25 percent

of all Army troops were draftees, and four of every ten volunteers for all services joined up because of draft pressure.

¶ In 1978, the active force stood at 2,069,000, with yet another cut (20,000) slated for 1979. In short, ending the draft has forced down Pentagon manpower, and, hence, to some degree, hurt U.S. military readiness, especially for nonnuclear war.

Lowered manpower goals have enabled the hard-working recruiters across the country to come close to their annual quotas (134,748 in 1978), albeit not without an occasional minor scandal over the enrollment of youths later found to be criminals or illiterates. High youth unemployment in the 1970s, especially among minorities, and the Pentagon's emphasis on enlisting more women have further eased the recruiters' task.

But, even in terms of quantity, inescapable constraints loom ahead. Last year, just over 2.1 million American males reached age 18. By 1985, there will be only 1.8 million 18-year-old males. Overall, by 1990, the number of males in the prime recruiting group, aged 18–24, will be 17 percent below the 1978 figure. Unless the armed forces are cut further, the Pentagon will still have to draw on this group for as many men as are now recruited. A rise in women enlistments and a decline in standards for male recruits are commonly proposed as ways to offset this impending shrinkage of the manpower pool. Yet, the demands of combat and an increasingly complex military technology impose constraints here, too.

Reviving ROTC

By and large, the four services have been able to attract enough new junior officers—the Army and Marine second lieutenants who lead rifle platoons and the Navy ensigns who stand deck watches. Except for physicians and certain technical specialities, there has been no *shortage* of newly-commissioned ensigns and second lieutenants in the all-volunteer era. (Retention of experienced pilots and officer-technicians, attracted by higher pay and easier working conditions in civilian life, is an-

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other matter.) During the 1948–73 era, the pressure of the draft helped sustain Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) enrollment on campuses and also prompted college graduates to volunteer for other officer candidate programs. Enrollment in ROTC, now the major source of junior officers for all services except the Marines, hit a low of 63,000 in 1974 and climbed to 86,000 in 1978.*

The Absent Middle Class

When it comes to *quality* of enlisted personnel being recruited under the current system, the debate grows stronger in and out of the Pentagon. Overall Defense Department statistics—those cited most frequently by Pentagon officials—mask important differences among the services.

The Air Force has consistently had the biggest share of high school graduates among new three-year recruits, perhaps because its enlisted contingent—of mechanics, technicians, and logistics types—is largely barred from combat roles (jet fighters are flown by officers). The Navy has onerous requirements—notably long tours of sea duty—but it has been able to increase its proportion of high school graduates and ranks second. The Marine Corps, with its esprit and a high ratio of combat troops, comes in third; the largest and least glamorous of the services, the Army, ranks fourth and last.

Since the end of the draft, an average of less than 60 percent of male Army entrants have possessed a high school diploma. In 1964, the last peacetime year before the Vietnam War, high school graduates accounted for 71 percent of Army draftees and 60 percent of Army volunteers. The decline in the educational levels of the all-volunteer Army must be contrasted with the overall *increase* in high school graduates among U.S. males aged 18 to 24 years—from 66 percent in 1964 to 76 percent in 1977. About 17 percent of the draftees in 1964 had some college; the corresponding figure has been around 5 percent for entrants in the all-volunteer Army.

Recruits with high school diplomas, Pentagon studies show, are not necessarily braver or more patriotic. But they tend to have far fewer discipline problems, higher motivation, and

*Bowing to student and faculty pressures during the Vietnam era, Yale, Harvard, and Stanford among others, jettisoned ROTC. New units were created at less renowned institutions, particularly in the South and Southwest. All told, 280 campuses had ROTC units in 1978—contrasted with more than 300 campuses and a much larger 230,000 student enrollment in the mid-1960s. As for West Point, Annapolis, and the Air Force Academy, the number of applicants has risen since 1973; each service academy is limited by law to a student body of 4,417.

BLACKS AS A PERCENT OF TOTAL ARMED SERVICES PERSONNEL: 1964-78

	Army		Navy		Marine Corps		Air Force		All Services	
	Enlisted	Officer	Enlisted	Officer	Enlisted	Officer	Enlisted	Officer	Enlisted	Officer
1964	11.8	3.3	5.9	0.3	8.7	0.3	10.0	1.5	9.7	1.8
1974	21.3	4.5	8.4	1.3	18.1	2.5	14.2	2.2	15.7	2.8
1976	23.7	5.2	8.0	1.6	17.0	3.4	14.7	2.8	16.6	3.4
1978	29.0	7.0	9.0	2.0	19.0	4.0	15.0	4.0	19.0	4.0

Source: Department of Defense

greater adaptability to the demands of military training and the new technology. Even so, the Navy, in particular, finds that many of its high school graduates do not possess the reading ability required for shipboard tasks. The Army and the Navy have begun a series of remedial courses for enlisted men, with or without high school diplomas, designed to bring them up to eighth grade reading levels; roughly 25 percent of all Army recruits in 1977 read at sixth grade level or below.

The problem of "quality" should not be simply attributed, as it often is, to the increase in black enlistments. Racial minorities have done well in all the services.* The proportion of blacks has always been highest in the Army, a trend that has become more pronounced during the all-volunteer era. Blacks made up 34.9 percent of male Army recruits in fiscal year 1978 and 36.7 percent in the first quarter of fiscal year 1979. Although other minorities are less reliably tabulated, an overall figure of at least 6 percent, most of them Hispanic, is a conservative estimate. All told, four out of ten men now entering the Army's enlisted ranks are from these minority groups, which together account for only 18 percent of the nation's population.

Within Army enlisted ranks, as elsewhere in the services, the racial make-up varies by branch and career field; blacks tend to be concentrated in "low skill" fields, while whites are disproportionately found in technical specialties. For example, a 180-man Army rifle company or artillery battery may be made up of 50 percent blacks, 10 percent other minorities, with white officers and mostly black senior sergeants.

The educational level of blacks in America has lagged behind that of whites. But the decline in educational levels of new

*Blacks in 1978 accounted for 17 percent of the Army's sergeant majors and 22 percent of the master sergeants—the top two enlisted grades—although blacks only accounted for 12 percent of Army strength 15 years ago when most of today's noncoms first enlisted.

Army male recruits is not correlated with the increasing number of black soldiers. Indeed, since the end of the draft, the proportion of high school graduates among blacks entering the Army has *exceeded* that of whites, and this is a trend that is growing. In fact, today's Army is the only major arena in American society where black educational levels surpass those of whites, and by quite a significant margin.

What is happening is this: Whereas the black soldier is fairly representative of the black community, white recruits of recent years are coming from the least educated sectors of the white community. My stays with Army line units—infantry and armor—also leave the distinct impression that many of our enlisted white soldiers are coming from nonmetropolitan areas. I am struck by what I do *not* find in line units—urban and suburban white youths of middle-class origins. In other words, the all-volunteer Army is attracting not only a disproportionate number of minorities but also white youths who, if anything, are more uncharacteristic of the nation's broader social mix than are our minority soldiers.

Sports Cars and Stereos

One of the main premises of the 1970 Gates Commission—the blue-ribbon presidential panel that produced the rationale for the all-volunteer force—was that recruitment for the armed services should be guided by marketplace conditions and monetary inducements.

But moves to tie military pay to that of the civilian sector preceded the creation of the all-volunteer force. In 1967, soldier pay levels were formally linked to those of the Federal Civil Service and thus, indirectly, to the civilian labor market. In 1977, a Rand study concluded that *career* military personnel are now better paid than their civilian counterparts. A new recruit does pretty well too; a draftee got \$78 a month in 1964, but today's 18-year-old volunteer gets \$419 a month, plus free room and board and medical care.*

A visitor to an Army unit today can see clear signs of the young single GI's new buying power, starting with the sports

*Nevertheless, in order to fill the ranks, it has been found necessary to offer additional cash bonuses. In 1978, extra payments of up to \$2,000 were authorized for men willing to enlist in the ground combat arms—armor, infantry, artillery—for longer than normal two-year tours and who meet specified educational and aptitude standards. The Pentagon's reliance on cash inducements, however, may have accelerated the "erosion of benefits," such as access to military medical care for dependents, and the uncertainty over pensions that have corroded the morale of career officers and noncoms since the end of the draft.

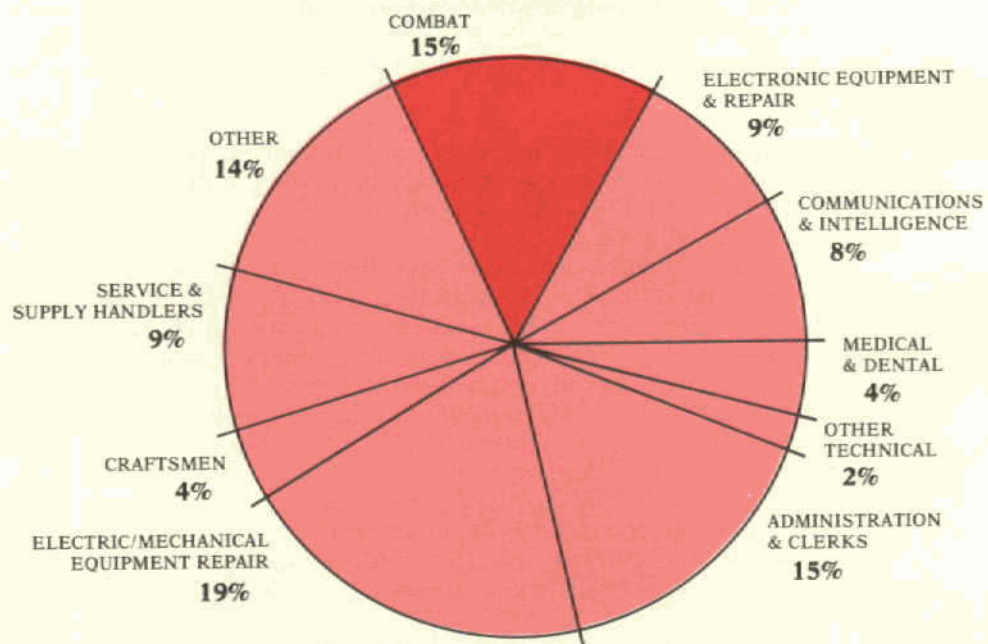
cars in the base parking lot. Despite the introduction of fast-food items and more varied menus, fewer and fewer soldiers are eating their meals in the "dining facility" (mess hall). In Germany, the typical young unmarried soldier invests money in an inordinately expensive stereo system or saves up to fly commercially to the United States to take his 30-day leave back home. In the United States, increasing numbers of single soldiers rent apartments off base and maintain bunks in the barracks only for inspection purposes—a custom virtually unheard of in the draft Army. One result of the single soldier's new disposable income has been the decline of barracks life and unit esprit.

Finding Babysitters

When I visit Army units, it becomes clear that the racial violence in many Army outfits (and in the Navy and Marines, as well) of the early 1970s has largely receded, though one detects a latent Klan spirit among some white soldiers. Crime is a problem, partly because there is more to steal from today's better paid soldiers than there was from the 1964 draftee. Marijuana use is widespread, as it is among American youth generally. Hard drugs still worry commanders in a few units, yet outsiders may exaggerate the problem. Alcohol abuse throughout the ranks has become a command concern.

Noncoms find it harder to enforce discipline than before; and if the anarchy of the early '70s has abated, the new enlistee is often quick to assert his "rights" if he feels put upon. The day when many enlisted men were better educated than their sergeants has gone, to the dismay, surprisingly enough, of many senior noncoms. A visitor is struck by the old sergeants' fond memories of the university graduates who served under them.

One unanticipated consequence of the shift to an all-volunteer force—and higher pay—has been a marked increase in marriage among the junior enlisted ranks. In 1977, the proportion of married personnel in the pay grade E-4—the average junior enlisted rank—was 46.7 percent, a figure almost double that of 1964. Today just about every major military base in the United States from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to Camp Pendleton, California, is ringed by trailer camps or shoddy apartment complexes where many of the young marrieds live an existence close to the poverty line, a condition that exacerbates what are often already unstable family lives. In West Germany, for lack of on-base housing, young Army couples live "on the economy" where they face cultural isolation, as well as financial distress as the U.S. dollar declines.

JOB DISTRIBUTION OF U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL


Source: Department of Defense, 1977

Oddly enough, the sharp increase in the number of young enlisted marrieds—a growing number of whom are service couples—runs directly counter to the national trend toward later marriage. And combat readiness suffers. Too often, one hears stories of infants being deposited in the orderly room (“Can’t find a babysitter”!) when an Army unit is placed on alert. In West Germany alone, the U.S. military must evacuate 160,000 wives and children in the event of Soviet attack.*

Life has never been easy for the young recruit—even under the softened regimen of the post-Vietnam era. In basic training, he still has to rise before dawn, respond to orders, test himself physically, get along with a host of new comrades in barracks. And, after basic training, there is often a letdown.

Here occurs one source of enlisted discontent that had no counterpart in the peacetime draft era. This is “post-entry disillusionment.” The draftee’s expectations were never high, hence

*By contrast, in South Korea, Army troops serve 13-month tours without dependents.

he was not unpleasantly surprised; indeed, he often—at least in hindsight—found the Army not so bad on its own terms. In all-volunteer recruitment, however, a consistent theme has been the stress—out of necessity, to be sure—on what the service can do for the recruit in the way of training in skills transferable to civilian jobs.

Although the advocates of the all-volunteer concept do not emphasize it, the irreconcilable dilemma is that many military assignments—mostly, but not exclusively, in the ground combat arms and aboard ship—do not and cannot have direct transferability to civilian occupations.

Post-entry disillusionment relates directly to the extremely high rate of attrition in the all-volunteer force. Since 1973, more than *one in three* recruits have failed to complete their initial enlistments: they were discharged for disciplinary reasons, personality disorders, or job inaptitude. Attrition rates are even higher in the Army and Marine combat units and in heavy labor categories, such as boiler tenders aboard Navy ships.

Moreover, the *desertion* rate in the all-volunteer force is twice as high as that in the pre-Vietnam period—17.8 per thousand enlisted personnel in 1977 compared to 7.9 percent in 1964. What makes the current desertion figures especially troublesome, of course, is that they occur on top of the high attrition rates.

These unsettling statistics lead us to the clear relationship between socioeconomic background and soldierly performance. High school graduates and those with some college are more

EDUCATIONAL LEVELS OF ARMY MALE RECRUITS: 1964–78

	Some College	High School Graduate	Non-High School Graduate
1964 Draftees	17.2%	54.1%	28.7%
1964 Enlistees	13.9	46.2	39.9
1975	5.7	48.6	45.7
1976	4.1	51.5	44.4
1977	5.1	51.1	43.8
1978	3.8	66.2	34.8

19- TO 20-YEAR-OLD MALES IN U.S.: 1977

	28.9%	47.5%	23.6%
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Source: Department of the Army statistics on non-prior-service entrants. Civilian data from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, 1978.

than twice as likely to complete their enlistments successfully. The evidence is also clear, contrary to conventional wisdom, that high aptitude, better-educated soldiers do better across the board—in “low skill” jobs as well as in “high skill” jobs. The shortage of such quality manpower has hit hardest at the combat arms and the crews of Navy warships, where “low aptitude” recruits tend to be assigned.

Thus the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps, increasingly dependent on more complex weaponry and communications gear, are bedeviled by problems of manpower quality even as the Pentagon faces overall problems of quantity when the manpower pool shrinks during the 1980s. This spring, even the Air Force, for the first time began to have trouble recruiting qualified youths.

Buying Alternatives

What to do? Influential specialists in Congress, including Senator Sam Nunn (D.-Ga.), see little prospect for a competent U.S. military force in the 1980s without recourse to some sort of compulsory national service. Barring a manifest new Soviet threat, most Congressmen and Carter Administration officials see no chance of a return to a peacetime draft. Adverse public opinion is one key reason.* And there are other questions. If Selective Service is revived, who should serve, when not all are needed?

Yet, most internal Pentagon proposals for better “manpower utilization” in the all-volunteer force have not addressed the central question: getting more able young men into the services, particularly into the ground combat arms or onto warships. Neither lowering physical/mental standards for men, nor even greater emphasis on remedial programs and “human relations,” nor increasing the number of women, nor greater reliance on civilian personnel fit the imperatives of combat readiness in tank, artillery, and infantry units or on Navy warships.

As I see it, the difficulties in the all-volunteer force do not originate in the death of conscription or in the efforts of service recruiters. The *crucial flaw* has been an informal redefinition since 1971 by Congress, the executive branch, and many “policy intellectuals” of military service as a function of “supply and demand variables,” as a “job” to be filled through “market in-

*A March 1977 Gallup poll showed 54 percent of respondents opposed to a return of the draft and 36 percent in favor. The Selective Service system is in “deep stand-by”; proposals to revive registration of young men have been made in Congress, but no such pre-emergency plans have been urged by the White House.

centives." In effect, starting with the Nixon Administration, we have sought to "buy" an alternative to the draft.

This Pentagon emphasis on individual cash compensation and material self-interest has helped move the U.S. military away from professionalism and institutional loyalty and esprit—the intangibles that also sustain Americans in uniform—toward an organizational mentality more and more resembling that of any civilian occupation. At its extreme, this mentality turns service people into "employees"—with the recent talk of military unionization as a natural by-product.

A New GI Bill?

Even at the recruiting level, inducements based mainly on economic incentives will be increasingly inadequate to provide the services with quality manpower. Studies show that high pay motivates low-aptitude youths—high school dropouts, those with poor grades—to join while having little attraction for more qualified youths.

Happily, proposals are being made to get the Pentagon away from simple cash inducements and to attract better-qualified young men. My own suggestion, advanced in congressional testimony last summer, was that the services offer potential recruits the option of a two-year enlistment (the old draft obligation) to be restricted to candidates for the combat arms, heavy labor jobs aboard ship, and other hard-duty fields.

The *quid pro quo* for such an assignment would be generous education benefits—along the lines of the GI bill for World War II veterans.* It would amount to four years in college in exchange for two years in the combat arms. The conditions of service would be honest and unambiguous, eliminating the "post-entry disillusionment" syndrome. Moreover, the recruit would be obligated to serve part-time in the reserves after discharge from active duty, thereby alleviating a major post-Vietnam gap in our defense posture.†

There is some evidence that a sufficient number of middle-class and upwardly mobile American youths would find such service a welcome brief diversion from the world of school or work. The added costs of this "New GI Bill" would be offset by reduced costs of attrition, by the elimination of current cash

*The World War II veteran got up to \$500 a year for tuition and \$75 a month subsistence—enough in 1945–50 to cover most costs of even a Harvard education. Subsequent "GI bills" have been far less generous.

†In 1978, the Army's "selected reserve," which includes National Guard units slated for early deployment in case of war in Europe, was more than 20 percent under strength.

WOMEN FILL THE GAP

No other nation has made so strong an effort to use women in the military. Since 1973, the U.S. Defense Department has doubled the number of female soldiers, airmen, marines, and sailors—with 132,000 (or 6 percent of the total enlisted force) planned for this year. By 1984, the projected figure is 208,000, or 12 percent of all the services' enlisted personnel; 17 percent of the Air Force will be women.

Feminist agitation has had some effect, notably in opening up West Point, Annapolis, and the Air Force Academy to female cadets in 1976 and in enabling women to serve aboard Navy support vessels. But the major impetus has been the Pentagon's recognition of an unpleasant reality: Under the present all-volunteer system, not enough "able and available" American males can be recruited to fill the services' ranks, even with today's higher pay and reduced manpower goals.

Although barred from front-line combat units and warships, service women now fly helicopters, command Army posts, serve aboard Navy repair ships, drive Marine bulldozers, stand watch at Air Force Titan II missile sites, and train with the 82nd Airborne Division. Such assignments, small in number, make headlines. Surveys show that most enlisted women prefer—and get—"traditional" jobs in medical and administrative fields. Almost all women recruits are high school graduates; they rank well below male enlistees in drug abuse, alcoholism, and AWOL rates.

Last year, the Pentagon asked Congress to lift the ban on women serving in combat units. But debate persists within the military over how many women can be utilized without hurting operational readiness. The Army, in particular, with 57,000 enlisted women, many of them already in truck companies and other combat support units, has run into problems. Field commanders now must cope with a 15 percent pregnancy rate among enlisted women, unwed mothers, demands for Army-provided child care, and what one 1978 Army study called the "creeping advance of sex fraternization" between male officers and enlisted women. Such burdens have revived field officers' complaints that the Army risks becoming a "social welfare agency." Women are needed, according to Defense Secretary Harold Brown, but "the key issue is to maintain the combat effectiveness of the armed forces."

bonuses for combat arms enlistees, and, most likely, by fewer dependents' allowances for junior enlisted men.

There are other grounds for encouraging such enlistments. The distinctive quality of the enlisted experience in modern American history has been the mixing of the social classes,

stereotyped in virtually every Hollywood movie about GIs at war. This began to diminish during the Vietnam conflict as the college-educated avoided service; it is rapidly disappearing in the all-volunteer Army.

To criticize a prosperous society that, in effect, excuses its privileged members from serving in the ranks is not to insist that the make-up of the enlisted force be perfectly "representative," an exact core sample of America's rich and not-so-rich, whites and nonwhites, Christians and Jews. The military should continue to be in the forefront of racial integration among both leaders and followers, as it has been since the early 1950s; that the military, as a profession or as a "step-up," attracts blacks is to its credit. But it is equally important that the participation of more middle-class youths in the enlisted ranks be considered a measure of our representative democracy and our dedication to equality of sacrifice. It is surprising that, given the extensive 1978 discussion of financial relief for families with children in college, no public figure has thought to tie such student aid to any service obligation, civilian or military, on the part of the youths who benefit.

Beyond the immediate problems of the all-volunteer force, there are nagging long-term questions. As it is now run, the all-volunteer force effectively excludes participation by most of those who will be America's future leaders, whether in government, the mass media, or, most notably, in the intellectual and academic communities. What effect will the evolution of a generation of political leaders who lack any firsthand experience have on future defense policy? Will military service gradually become viewed by the well-off as a solution for those with no other options?

In the final analysis, reliance on the market system is not the way to recruit or sustain an all-volunteer force, nor is it the way to strengthen the armed services for increasingly complex and demanding tasks on behalf of the larger society, in a time of world tensions and uncertainty.

