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# Winning the Retention Wars

## The Air Force, Women Officers, and the Need for Transformation

Laura A. H. DiSilverio  
Lieutenant Colonel, USAF



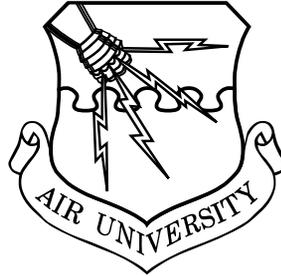
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LAURA A. H. DiSILVERIO  
Lieutenant Colonel, USAF

Fairchild Paper

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*Dedicated To*  
*Muir S. Fairchild (1894-1950), the first commander of*  
*Air University and the university's conceptual father.*  
*General Fairchild was part visionary, part keen taskmaster,*  
*and "Air Force to the core." His legacy is one of confidence*  
*about the future of the Air Force and the central*  
*role of Air University in that future.*

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## Foreword

The Air Force and the national defense mission are the big losers when talented individuals choose to separate early. Although specific separation figures are not available, analysis of the percentage of men and women by commissioned years of service in the Air Force indicates that women separate prior to retirement more frequently than men. The percentages of men and women remain steady through the first four years, the typical period of post-commissioning commitment. By the fifth year, the number of women drops 2 percent, and by the following year, the number of women drops an additional four percent, with corresponding increases in the percentage of men. The percentage of women continues to decrease gradually through year 20, the point of retirement eligibility. Having determined that women separate from the Air Force prior to retirement eligibility more often than men, Lt Col Laura DiSilverio wanted to find out why.

The only people with the answers were the women who had separated, so the author developed a survey to elicit the reasons for separating. The results of this survey of 1,000 women appear in this paper. The first chapter demonstrates why the Air Force needs women. It makes the demographic case and presents research results showing the value of diversity in general and the value of women leaders in particular. The second chapter presents the survey results, analyzes why women separate from the Air Force, and lists the types of programs that might retain them. The final chapter looks at the feasibility of implementing some programs that might help the Air Force retain more of its talented members.

As the Air Force surges into the twenty-first century and prosecutes the global war on terrorism, it must analyze its force mix and organizational structures across the total force. We must counter asymmetric threats and capabilities by asymmetric thinking not only about how we employ systems, but

also about how we organize, manage, and lead our people. Revolutionary change is imperative.

*Shirley Brooks Laseter*  
Dr. Shirley B. Laseter  
Director  
Air University Library & Press

## About the Author



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She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English (Rhetoric) from Trinity University and a Master of Arts degree in English (Literature) from the University of Pennsylvania. She was a distinguished graduate of Squadron Officer School and Air Command and Staff College and completed Air War College in residence in June 2002.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to gratefully acknowledge many people whose generosity with their time, expertise, and support made it possible for me to complete this project. These people include my seminar mates who stuffed 1,000 envelopes and applied 1,000 stamps to help mail out surveys; all those who graciously granted me interviews, sharing their time and expertise; SSgt Smith in Student Operations, and the orderly room staff for their administrative support; Dr. Daniel Henk and Col Thomas Hall for their critical reviews of paper drafts and encouragement throughout; my family for putting up with my absorption in this project for nine months; and, most of all, the Air Force women who generously responded to the survey, sharing their time, insights, and personal experiences in the hope that their contributions might improve our nation's Air Force.

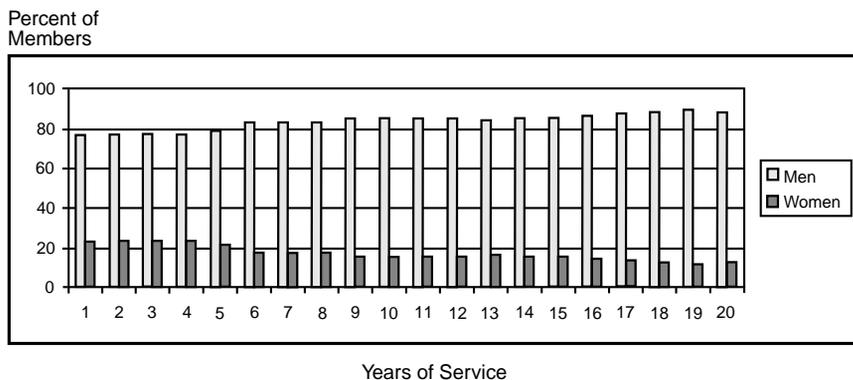
## Introduction

During my last assignment as a squadron commander, I signed off on the paper work allowing three noncommissioned officers (NCO) to separate from the Air Force due to pregnancy. Only one of those women wanted to separate from the Air Force. The other two felt they were forced to leave the Air Force because there was no adequate child care at our geographically separated location in England to support the needs of a dual-career family working rotating 12-hour shifts. Only open from 0645 until 1830 on weekdays, the Child Development Center did not even completely support the needs of workers on the day shift. Workers on “mids,” (shifts from 1900 to 0700) had to rely on outside child care providers. During the two years I served at Royal Air Force Menwith Hill, the base had only one licensed child care provider. That was not enough for a workforce of approximately 2,000 people. Off-base child care was prohibitively expensive and inconvenient, and few caregivers were willing to provide overnight care. Dual-career couples literally had no acceptable options. So, the three NCOs left the Air Force, creating a lose-lose-lose situation. The women lost because they valued their Air Force careers and did not want to leave. The Air Force lost not only loyal NCOs, but also a large monetary investment: one of the women was a linguist trained in a language of great value to the Air Force today, and two were intelligence NCOs with highly specialized, technical abilities and experience. All had spent at least 18 months in training. The national security mission suffered because replacements for those women could not arrive for at least six months.

Over the course of several months spanning my transition from commander to student, I resolved to try and make sense of some of the factors I saw coming into play in the above situations. One fact crystallized my thinking and spawned the research project I embarked on at Air War College: The Air Force and the national defense mission are the big losers when talented individuals choose to separate early—for whatever reason—from the military. Anecdotally, it seems clear that women more frequently separate from the Air Force prior to reaching retirement eligibility than men. Although the Air

Force Personnel Center would not make specific separation figures available, analysis of the percentage of men and women by commissioned years of service in the Air Force appears to bear out the anecdotal evidence. The percentages of men and women remain steady through the first four years, the typical period of post-commissioning commitment. By the fifth year, the number of women drops 2 percent, and by the following year, the number of women drops an additional 4 percent, with corresponding increases in the percentage of men. As figure 1 shows, the percentage of women continues to decrease gradually through year 20, the point of retirement eligibility. Having determined that women do, in fact, separate from the Air Force prior to retirement eligibility more often than men, I wanted to find out why.

The only people with the answers were the women who had separated, so I developed a survey to elicit their reasons for separating. The results of this survey of 1,000 women appear later in this paper. However, another question begged for an answer: Why should the Air Force care if women are separating earlier and in greater numbers than men? Frankly, when I began this project, I was not *sure* the Air Force should care



**Figure 1. Percentage of Men and Women by Years of Commissioned Service**

Source: Air Force Personnel Center, Personnel Statistics Website—Officer Demographics, “Commissioned Years of Service, By Gender, Aero Rating,” n.d., on-line, Internet, available from <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/demographics/officermenu.htm>

for any other reason than that it needs a certain number of 98.6 degree bodies to fill its billets. My instincts all told me that the Air Force should fight to retain *any* talented individual and that women have something unique to offer that makes the Air Force a better, more effective organization because they are part of it. But one, tiny, disquieting part of my mind surfaced the thought that maybe the Air Force mission could be accomplished just as effectively by an all-male force, or even a white male force. And if that thought occurred to me, I knew others would think of it as well (even if they would not say it in today's politically correct environment). Never mind the fact that the Air Force can no longer recruit sufficient personnel for an all-volunteer force without including women and minorities; if the Air Force and civilian leadership remain unconvinced that women (and other minorities) do contribute to mission effectiveness, then they have no incentive to find out why women separate from the Air Force in greater numbers than men or to develop programs to retain them. Sadly, the fact that the Air Force has conducted no research to determine why women separate from the Air Force suggests either that leaders have not noticed the problem, or that they do not consider it to be a problem.<sup>1</sup> Either way, the lose-lose-lose scenario of the first paragraph is perpetuated.

Numerous direct quotations from the survey and statistics calculated from the survey answers are given in the text, but most have no note citations. The original survey materials are retained in the author's personal collection.

This paper contains three major sections. The first section demonstrates why the Air Force needs women. It makes the demographic case and presents research results showing the value of diversity in general and the value of women leaders in particular. The second section presents the survey results and analyzes why women separate from the Air Force and what sorts of programs might retain them longer. The third section looks at the feasibility of implementing some programs that might help the Air Force retain more of its talented members longer—regardless of gender.

There are two things this paper specifically does *not* contain. It does not contain a rehash of the "Do women belong in

combat?" issue. The nation's legislators have settled that question. Further, the military could not make up the numbers in an all-volunteer force without women, and Congress probably would include women in a draft. This paper also does not contain any suggestion that the Air Force implement programs designed to benefit only one demographic group. The policy and program changes in the third chapter apply equally to all Air Force members and may well boost retention in all demographic areas.

As the Air Force surges into the twenty-first century and prosecutes the global war on terrorism, it must analyze its force mix and organizational structures across the total force. We must counter asymmetric threats and capabilities by asymmetric thinking not only about how we employ systems, but also about how we organize, manage, and lead our people. Revolutionary change is imperative. Most of the discussion of a revolution in US military affairs (RMA) has centered around technology, and yet a key ingredient of an RMA has always been organizational structures. Technology alone, or reliance on technology alone, will result in failure. The ideas in this paper might shake up some of the rigid institutional mind-sets that have restricted the Air Force's ability to capitalize on technological advances. By offering new ways of thinking about people's value and transformational ways of shaping Air Force culture, organization, and personnel practices, this paper provides a blueprint for the Air Force's first steps on the path to an RMA grounded in organizational structures.

#### **Note**

1. Approximately every three years the Air Force Personnel Center's Surveys Branch distributes an "exit" survey to members who have submitted separation paperwork. This data is presented, along with data from a careers survey that determines why individuals stay in the Air Force, in a report from Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC). The most recent report is AFPC, *Report on Career Decisions in the Air Force: Results of the 2000 USAF Careers and New Directions Surveys* (Randolph Air Force Base, Tex.: AFPC, 30 November 2000). The data is broken out by officer-enlisted. Nowhere is the data broken out by male-female; thus, no one has analyzed data to determine if women separate for different reasons than men.

## Chapter 1

### **Why the Air Force Needs Women**

This chapter answers the question: “Why does the Air Force need women?” For some individuals, the answer is intuitively obvious and they might wonder why I pose the question. For others, the response is, “It doesn’t.” This chapter is for the readers who fall somewhere between these two extremes and who cannot articulate exactly what women bring to the table, but who are pretty much convinced that an all-male force is not in the best interests of our nation’s defense. Demographics and diversity are the keys to understanding the title statement. Demographics, as presented below, demonstrate conclusively that the Air Force needs to recruit talent from every source and show that women will make up a larger portion of the available talent in the upcoming decade.

This chapter also presents research on the benefits of diversity for an organization, that is, the benefits of including a mix of ethnicities and gender in the workplace. Does this research prove conclusively that all organizations are better off including minorities on their payrolls? No. The research presents a convincing circumstantial case for the benefits of diversity, but available scholarship lacks a mensuration capacity to bring empirical analysis to this subjective topic. I am aware of the bias within the Air Force, peopled as it is by engineers and pilots, for such quantifiable data as airspeed, number of safety mishaps, or percentage of Air War College graduates promoted to colonel. However, too many factors may have contributed to a company’s rise in sales one quarter to definitively claim it was due to the addition of two women and an Hispanic man to the sales team. Similarly, it is impossible to state that a 20 percent improvement in retention of airmen in one squadron is a direct result of a female commander or first sergeant. The fact that the results are not quantifiable does not negate their impact or importance. Many a court case has been proven *beyond a reasonable doubt* by the preponderance of circumstantial evidence.

## The War for Talent

Few people would argue with the contention that the military needs good people to be an effective force. "People are our most precious resource," is an often-heard refrain in military briefings. "Mission first, people always" is another popular slogan. The Air Force, in particular, with its reliance on high-end technologies, needs talented, educated, and innovative people to carry out its missions. Recruiting and retaining those people is a challenge engaging the attention of the Air Force's most senior leaders and personnel experts. "Meeting the fiscal 2000 recruiting goal is good news," SSgt K. Fitzgerald Stewart reports, "but keeping those new recruits in Air Force blue is one of the greater challenges facing the service today."<sup>1</sup> Lt Col Julie Stanley, the Air Force's chief of retention policy, told *Air Force News* that the Air Force is "working hard to fix the retention issues."<sup>2</sup> But despite the emphasis put on recruitment and retention, the military is losing the war for talent, contends David H. McCormick in a 1999 report for *The McKinsey Quarterly*. He states the consequences of losing the war for talent: "To lose the war for talent is to accept a second-rate military in which the most capable men and women in the United States do not choose to serve."<sup>3</sup>

The military is not alone in its quest for talented people. Corporations across the United States are engaged in the same battle for talent, and many of them think the fight is intensifying. In a 2000 survey of 6,900 managers at 56 large and mid-size companies, 89 percent thought it was harder to recruit good people than it was in 1997, and 90 percent thought it was more difficult to retain them.<sup>4</sup> The military's challenge is substantially greater than the corporate challenge for several reasons. First and foremost, the military must grow its senior and midlevel leaders from within its own ranks. The military cannot reach out and tap the successful chief executive officer of a manufacturing firm to fill a general's slot or hire an insurance executive as a squadron commander. It is limited to the people it has trained and retained long enough to garner sufficient seniority and expertise to fill those positions. Thus, losing midlevel people is much more debilitating for the military than it is for the private sector. Second, supervisors within the

military lack the ability to hire, fire, or promote their “employees,” a situation that is virtually unique in the world marketplace for talent. Finally, the military’s ability to develop its people’s talent is compromised by frequent rotations of personnel.<sup>5</sup>

Several trends serve both to reduce the availability of talent over the coming decade and create more competition for it. The number of 35- to 44-year olds, that is, those individuals sufficiently “seasoned” to move into senior level jobs in either the military or civilian sectors, will decline by 15 percent between 2000 and 2001.<sup>6</sup> One generation will have aged, and the generation behind it has 15 percent fewer people in the critical age bracket. At the same time, the global environment is driving a requirement for an increasingly sophisticated workforce, for which all employers will compete. The Air Force is not exempt from the need for a sophisticated workforce. In the military, fighting with coalitions will require cross-cultural competencies and the ability to lead and manage complex, disaggregated organizations. Additionally, technological literacy is also key even at senior levels. And it will become more so as the Air Force embraces concepts of net-centric warfare and information operations.

Another trend Elizabeth Chambers points out is the rise of small- and medium-sized companies that exert a powerful pull on the available talent. Small companies offer “opportunities for impact and wealth that few large firms can match,”<sup>7</sup> she states. Military leaders would argue that people looking for wealth are not attracted to military service in the first place, and that is mostly true. However, the kinds of people who want to serve in the military *are* the kinds of people who want to have an impact. In many cases, the dynamic, smaller business ventures springing up around the United States offer an earlier opportunity to have an impact than does the military hierarchy.

The last trend impacting recruitment and retention is increasing job mobility. Ten years ago, a superior performer might have changed employers only once or twice in her career. Today, the average executive will work for five companies.<sup>8</sup> The concept of loyalty to an employer is not what it was 20 years ago, or even a decade ago. Although the Air Force does much

to instill an ethic of loyalty, it cannot count on as many members “making a career” of the Air Force at the start of the millennium as it did 10 or 15 years ago. Recruits coming into the Air Force today have watched their parents switch jobs numerous times and are comfortable with the idea of changing employers. The Air Force and business corporations must create a value proposition that does not hinge solely on loyalty.<sup>9</sup>

The scarcity of talent and the never-ending need to recruit, develop, and retain that talent, may well keep military leaders awake at night. Although not explicitly stated, one thing should be clear by now: no employer, including the military, can afford to overlook any source of talent. The military needs to explore new avenues for filling its ranks with the most qualified, talented people. Once it has recruited those people, the military needs to make some significant organizational changes, discussed later, to retain them. One potential, under-exploited source for military talent is women.

Two basic reasons exist for attempting to attract and retain women in the Air Force. First, and more simply, the Air Force can no longer fill its billets or get its job done without women. Overall, women make up about 18 percent of the Air Force—17.3 percent of the officers and 19.5 percent of the enlisted force. Currently, there are 66,376 women on active duty in the Air Force.<sup>10</sup> Recruiters freely admit that they could not recruit sufficient numbers of qualified men to fill the billets women currently occupy. So, in one sense, the debate about whether women belong in the Air Force is frivolous. There simply would not be an effective Air Force without women.

Further, that situation is not going to improve. Population statistics and projections show that of the roughly 42 million people expected to enter the workforce between 1998 and 2008, half will be female. Assuming that this trend continues to 2025, the American labor force, from which the Air Force pulls its personnel, will become more female (48 percent of the available talent will be female versus 46 percent in 1998).<sup>11</sup> Even more significantly from the perspective of officer recruitment, the number of women earning college degrees (a bachelor’s degree is a commissioning requirement) will increase 18 percent by 2009–10 to 776,000. The number of bachelor’s degrees granted to men is

expected to increase only 5 percent over the same period to 547,000.<sup>12</sup> In other words, there will be almost 230,000 more women in the United States in 2010 eligible for commissioning as an Air Force officer than there will be men. Clearly, the Air Force cannot ignore these numbers.

### **The Value of Diversity**

Beyond the numbers, however, lies another consideration. The Air Force may be more effective at accomplishing its mission with women as part of the force. Years of research on the benefits and problems associated with increasing the diversity of a workforce have proven that in the business community a more diverse workforce is associated with increased productivity, reduction in operating costs, improved quality of management, and increased gain and retention of market share.<sup>13</sup> Admittedly, it is difficult to transfer the results of research on profit-motivated corporations to the government or, more particularly, the military. Our experience with Total Quality Management taught us that. However, the nature of the military makes it difficult to produce quantifiable research on the value versus the cost of diversity. The fact that the military is not usually engaged in war fighting provides a narrow window for observation of its *raison d'être* activity. And observations based on the peacetime activities of the military might produce data with no more relevance to its wartime mission than the data derived from examining corporations. Thus, this chapter carefully extrapolates from the large body of research previously accomplished on corporate entities and shows probable points of intersection with the military experience. It also looks at some research conducted on police departments, since police departments, like the military, are chartered by society to “manage violence,” and are clearly masculine by tradition. They engage in their version of “war” on a routine basis, thus providing more opportunity for assessing the results of recruiting and retaining women.

A significant body of research exists on the value of diversity for corporations. In *The New Leaders: Guidelines on Leadership Diversity in America*, Ann M. Morrison separates the benefits of

diversity into four major areas as mentioned above: increased productivity, reduced operating costs, increased gain and retention of market share, and improved quality of management.<sup>14</sup> At first glance, neither the first item (increased productivity), nor the last (gain and retention of market share) apply to the military, but certain parallels can be drawn.

### **Increased Productivity**

The Air Force is neither a production-oriented organization nor a service-oriented one in the strictest sense of the business world. Yet, the Air Force does provide a variety of services—defense of the nation, peacekeeping, deterrence, and others—to the citizens of the United States and its allies. So, even though there is no profit motive involved in providing these services, the Air Force still needs to be concerned with many of the issues facing profit-motivated organizations. The list includes recruiting, developing, and retaining personnel; acquiring and utilizing material resources; getting an acceptable return on investment; instituting efficient logistics practices; and maintaining a favorable public image. Indeed some researchers' findings on increased productivity apply to the Air Force. It might be useful to translate "increased productivity" as "enhanced performance" for the purposes of applying this research to the Air Force.

Researchers have found it difficult to quantify the impact of diversity on productivity or performance. However, many executives interviewed by researchers feel that they receive greater productivity from employees who enjoy their work experience, who have low levels of work-related stress, and who feel valued and competent. Morrison cites a study titled *Ensuring Minority Success in Corporate Management* that showed "a multicultural approach has a positive effect on employees' perception of equity, which in turn affects their morale, goal setting, effort, and performance. Organizational productivity is consequently improved."<sup>15</sup>

The reverse has also proven true. Data from the United States workforce demonstrates that minorities, specifically women and nonwhite men, have a higher turnover rate and higher absentee rates than white men. A frequently advanced argument

suggests that women's turnover rates in the workplace can be attributed to pregnancy and child rearing. However, a 1990 article in the *Wall Street Journal* presented research that showed women have higher turnover rates than men at all ages, not just during the childbearing years.<sup>16</sup> Although some have interpreted the higher turnover and absentee rates to mean women and nonwhite males have less loyalty or "stick-to-itiveness," a review of research data conducted by Taylor Cox Jr., associate professor of organizational behavior and human research management at the University of Michigan, showed that "organizational experiences of out-group members tend to be less positive than those of majority group members."<sup>17</sup> In other words, they have less job satisfaction and are therefore more likely to leave the organization.

Other studies have demonstrated a link between job satisfaction and reduced employee turnover and absenteeism. Reducing turnover and absenteeism must have a positive effect on increasing productivity, or, in the case of the Air Force, improving performance. Especially in an organization like the Air Force, where talent must be grown from within the organization and cannot be hired at the mid or senior leader level from outside sources, reducing turnover is critical. Reducing turnover and absenteeism also contribute to cost savings, as the next section demonstrates.

Such vital organizational attributes as innovation and creativity are linked to diversity. No one could deny that in the current national security situation, the Air Force needs to foster innovation and creativity in its workforce. The host of threats confronting the country, both asymmetrical and conventional, makes it imperative to identify and develop innovative leaders in the Air Force. "Traditional" thinking about the nature of warfare, the employment of airpower, and other strategic issues will not suffice in the fluid, changing, and dangerous world environment our military now confronts. Numerous studies, including an article for *Academy of Management Executive*, have shown a link between increased diversity and increased innovation within a company.<sup>18</sup> Other research found a link between what is essentially job satisfaction and "feeling valued" by employers and increased innovation without the need for

reward or recognition.<sup>19</sup> These studies support the contention that increased diversity results in increased innovation, a significant component of enhanced performance.

Similar to innovation, creativity is enhanced by diversity within an organization. Cox points out, "Enhancing creativity and problem-solving quality are prime concerns of organizational leaders. To the extent that the existence of group-identity diversity facilitates these, it adds an important motivation for actively seeking to maintain a diverse workforce rather than merely to manage one if it happens to present itself."<sup>20</sup> A significant body of research supports the contention that heterogeneity in work teams promotes creativity and innovation. Cox summarizes some of the major studies:

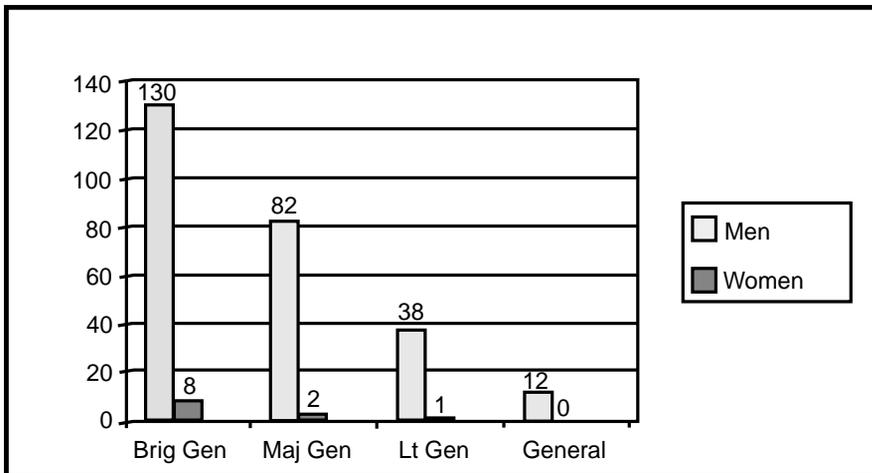
- R. M. Kanter's research showed that companies that deliberately structure heterogeneous work teams "create a marketplace of ideas" and tended to have lower levels of racism, sexism, and classism in their work environments.
- Charlene Nemeth demonstrated that "minority views can stimulate consideration of nonobvious alternatives in group tasks." She concluded that groups with minority members were more creative than homogeneous groups.
- McLeod, Lobel, and Cox conducted research that showed that ideas produced by groups of diverse composition were rated 11 percent higher in terms of feasibility and overall effectiveness than those generated by homogeneous groups.
- Hoffman and Maier discovered that 65 percent of groups with different personality types and genders produced high-quality solutions (new, modified, or integrative approaches) to a problem, as compared to only 21 percent of homogeneous groups.<sup>21</sup>

These findings apply equally to the Air Force and the corporate world. Increased innovation and creativity in work groups must benefit any organization. In the current national security environment, new enemies and challenges for the country, such as establishing an effective homeland defense, "out of the box" thinking is more critical than ever. Yet, look at the senior leadership of the Air Force. Of the 255 generals in the Air

Force, 98 percent are males, mostly in their 40s and 50s. Available data do not reveal percentages by race, although observation indicates the percentage of nonwhites is very small.<sup>22</sup> Only 11 of the generals are women, and if the lowest rank, brigadier general, were eliminated, only two would be women (fig. 2). I venture to suggest that there are few US organizations of 380,000 people whose executive ranks are so homogeneous.<sup>23</sup> In light of the above research, what impact must that homogeneity have on Air Force creativity and innovation at the most senior levels?

### Cost Savings

Managers interviewed by Ann Morrison for her book, *The New Leaders*, expect diversity programs to result in a decrease in turnover, especially for nontraditional employees (women and minorities). Clearly, these companies' diversity programs consist of more than merely allowing nontraditional employees



**Figure 2. Number of USAF General Officers by Gender**

Source: Air Force Personnel Center, Personnel Statistics Website—Officer Demographics, "Commissioned Years of Service, By Gender, Aero Rating," n.d., on-line, Internet, available from <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/demographics/officermenu.htm>

to join the organization. Equally clear is the difficulty in establishing a direct causal link between diversity programs and a reduction in turnover because other factors almost certainly play a role. However, Corning Incorporated knows there is a definite link. The international company instituted innovative diversity practices in 1987 when it discovered women and minorities were leaving the company at twice the rate of white men and that this was costing the company \$2-\$4 million per year.<sup>24</sup> Their diversity programs successfully cut costs by reducing the attrition rates of white women and blacks. In just three years, Corning slashed its attrition rates for white women from 16.2 percent to 7.6 percent, a reduction that Corning's executives are convinced has decreased their recruiting and training costs.<sup>25</sup>

The Air Force stands to leverage the same benefits. Recruiting and training costs are a significant percentage of the Air Force's personnel budget. The Air Force, like the corporate sector, must constantly fight to prevent its trained people from becoming assets for other organizations. The commercial airlines, in particular, benefit from the Air Force's excellent pilot training programs. The loss of a pilot is costly for the Air Force, not only in dollars, but also in experience. Consider, for instance, the replacement cost of one pilot. Assuming that pilot graduated from Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training (SUPT) (Primary) and Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training (Bomber/Fighter) and went on to F-16 Basic Training, that individual has cost the Air Force approximately \$3.5 million in pilot training costs alone.<sup>26</sup> That does not include such other costs as accession, other training, and permanent change of station (PCS). The experience acquired is virtually priceless. Although the percentage of pilots who are women is relatively low (421 of 12,007 pilots in the Air Force), the potential cost savings to the Air Force of retaining only a handful of those who might otherwise have separated is substantial.<sup>27</sup>

### **Gain/Retain Market Share**

Although the Air Force and the military in general are not fighting specifically for "market share" in the same sense as corporations, they are fighting to recruit from the same populace

as profit-minded organizations, and they are fighting to retain the public's trust in the military as an institution. If the military as an organization is too separate and distinct from the society it serves, it will have trouble retaining trust and may have trouble responding appropriately to its civilian leadership. Numerous academicians, political pundits, military officers, and Department of Defense civilians have written recently about a growing gap between the US military and the society it serves. They worry about the lack of military experience among senior civilian leaders, a growing conservatism and political activism among military officers, and a loosening of the bond between military members and American communities. Syndicated columnist George F. Will writes, "It's a fundamental principle that armed services can truly serve a democracy only if they are a reflection of that society and are impacted by the same social trends."<sup>28</sup>

Concerned about the growing conservatism of the officer corps, Pentagon correspondent Thomas Ricks cites surveys that indicate service academy freshmen are now twice as likely as their peers at civilian colleges to consider themselves conservative.<sup>29</sup> "The shift to the right has been rather remarkable, even while there has been an infusion of rather more liberal women and minorities,"<sup>30</sup> one of the study's conductors concluded. This implies that including more women and minorities in the force mix adds a valuable leavening of liberal perspectives, among other essential traits and expertise. None of the writers quoted here suggests eliminating the gap between the military and society by making the military a direct reflection of the civilian population. Clearly, that would be impossible and detrimental to the accomplishment of the military mission. However, narrowing the gap is both possible and valuable. Including more women and minorities in the officer ranks is one possible way of narrowing the gap. The need for more diversity in the officer corps is especially acute, as former Secretary of the Navy Richard Danzig points out: "Our military cannot live apart from our society. That risk is low for our diverse and fluctuating enlisted ranks. It is high for our much smaller and less representative corps of career officers."<sup>31</sup> Just as corporations find value and profit in having sales forces and

personnel that reflect the customer base, so, too, can tensions between the military and its “customer base”—society—be lessened by acquisition of a more intellectually and politically diverse officer corps.

### **Improved Quality of Management**

Retaining women longer in the Air Force *will* result in an improved quality of management. As women move into the more senior ranks (O-5 and above), they will naturally supervise more and more people. Women bring with them a host of abilities and personality types that will strengthen the upper levels of Air Force leadership and management. In *The New Leaders*, Morrison cites several ways that women or other minority members strengthen the leadership cadres. First, a company has a greater pool of candidates for leadership positions if it considers women and minority members. This competition, Morrison suggests, encourages the majority population—in this case, white men—to perform better and helps weed out the less competent individuals. Second, having to manage a diverse pool of employees helps leaders strengthen their people skills and management abilities. Third, exposure to a diverse range of colleagues helps leaders develop breadth and openness. A study done by Donald Campbell Pelz demonstrated that scientists who frequently interacted with an array of colleagues with different values and backgrounds were the stand-out performers.<sup>32</sup> Fourth, the personnel programs and policies adopted to help change an organization’s culture to be inclusive of women and minorities frequently benefit all employees.

Women have abilities and characteristics that enhance an organization’s leadership corps and go beyond the improvements that diversity in general makes to the quality of management in an organization. A large body of research strongly suggests that women have leadership styles that are intrinsic and are “better” than the leadership styles commonly displayed by men. It is not the purpose of this paper to debate whether women or men make better leaders. Rather, this paper demonstrates that the Air Force needs to work to retain women longer. To that end, it is enough to show that women’s leadership styles are *no less effective* than men’s and that they

are frequently *different* than men's. If one accepts the rationale that different leadership styles are more or less effective depending on the situation, it should be obvious that a large organization with a diverse range of activities, missions, and personnel must benefit from a broader range of leadership styles.

Citing massive layoffs from a decade ago and the resultant diminution of employee loyalty, Mark Sappenfield and Julie Day, writing for the *Christian Science Monitor*, contend that what organizations need now are "people who create a relationship with employees and instill in them a commitment to the organization. Studies have repeatedly shown that this means women."<sup>33</sup> They go on to cite details from several of those studies. For instance, a five-year study conducted by Lawrence Pfaff and Associates showed that more than 2,400 managers in 19 states rated women higher than men on 17 of 20 leadership skills. Among the skills on which women scored higher were coaching, planning, teamwork, empowering employees, decisiveness, and resourcefulness. In a similar study of 58,000 managers, Personnel Decisions in Minneapolis found that women came out on top in 20 of 23 measures of leadership. Janet Irwin and Michael Perrault garnered similar results in their survey of more than 6,400 questionnaires: Women were ranked higher in 28 of 31 management categories.<sup>34</sup> *Business Week* magazine reviewed a plethora of management studies such as these and concluded: "After years of analyzing what makes leaders most effective and figuring out who's got the Right Stuff, management gurus now know how to boost the odds of getting a great executive: Hire a female."<sup>35</sup>

These studies will not convince everyone that women are good leaders. Some will argue that women's leadership styles are not essential, may even be detrimental, for what have traditionally been labeled "masculine" pursuits, such as the military, firefighting, or policing. Yet, a study conducted on male and female police executives had virtually the same findings as the other studies mentioned above: Women had scores more closely associated with leadership on five of the measures used by the Dynamic Personality Inventory (DPI) to measure leadership ability, while men outscored women on only one trait. The scores for men and women were too close

on the other five traits the DPI measures to differentiate between the sexes.<sup>36</sup> The female police executives outperformed the men on the following measures:

- Emotional Independence—This trait measures an individual's need for freedom of movement and for emotional independence.<sup>37</sup>
- Verbal Aggression—This trait measures both verbally aggressive and intellectually aggressive behavior. It is an indicator of the self-assertive behavior of the individual.
- Social Roles—This trait measures the tendency to seek social roles and is suggestive of the social adequacy of the individual.
- Conservatism—This trait measures the level of flexibility and the tendency to stick to routine and convention. The trait is particularly associated with executive performance since it is an indicator of whether an individual can take a novel approach to problems.
- Concern with Appearance—This trait measures a positive self-image and self-confidence.<sup>38</sup>

That women executives in a traditionally masculine career more than hold their own against male counterparts is significant. This compilation of studies provides ample proof that women are as successful in leadership roles as men, even in traditionally masculine arenas where the management and employment of deadly force is necessary. That alone should warrant a push on the part of the Air Force to retain women longer because it expands the pool of available leadership talent and experiences.

In addition to being effective leaders, many women have a different leadership style than men. Judy Rosener, writing for *Harvard Business Review*, argues that women leaders “are succeeding because of—not in spite of—certain characteristics generally considered to be ‘feminine’ and inappropriate in leaders.”<sup>39</sup> Rosener characterizes women’s leadership styles as “interactive” and “transformational.” Women, she asserts, work to encourage participation, boost others’ sense of self-worth, engender excitement about work in others, and share both information and the power that frequently flows from it.<sup>40</sup> Others

have characterized women's styles as "connective leadership" and as "democratic or participative."<sup>41</sup> In their review of 162 studies of the leadership style differences between men and women, Alice Eagly and Blair Johnson of Purdue University found that the strongest evidence of a sex difference in leadership style was "the tendency for women to adopt a more democratic or participative style and for men to adopt a more autocratic or directive style."<sup>42</sup>

What does all this mean in terms of its impact on an organization? One thing it means is the potential for retaining outstanding individuals longer in the organization. A key element of women's leadership style is the ability to involve others and to engender loyalty by connecting individuals and their personal goals to the goals of the group (the Air Force, for example).<sup>43</sup> Increasing the loyalty members feel to the Air Force is key in this era of retention difficulties. Some of the traits women have which result in their connective or participatory styles include friendliness, pleasantness, interest in other people, expressiveness, and social sensitivity. Women as a group, when compared to men as a group, are more often described as possessing the above traits.<sup>44</sup> Rosener's research demonstrated that women work to facilitate inclusion by creating mechanisms that foster participation, by listening, and by conversational styles that invite others to get involved.<sup>45</sup>

The leadership style described above has its detractors. Some argue that a more participatory leadership style is at odds with the military need to issue orders and make instantaneous decisions in moments of crisis. First, participatory does not mean indecisive. Second, although some women's natural inclination may be toward a participatory style, that does not mean they cannot recognize and act on the need for adopting an autocratic style. Air Force training, if nothing else, helps all members internalize the necessity for issuing and obeying orders. Although others may be tempted to denigrate what they term a "touchy feely" style, the hard facts prove a more participatory style breeds loyalty in the new generation of workers who want to feel like individuals and who have a variety of lifestyles and needs that more autocratic leadership styles tend to dismiss or ignore. A large organization cannot

afford to ignore or alienate any potential source of talent and hope to remain competitive.

Another benefit of women's more inclusive style is increased cohesion and effectiveness of teams. For the Air Force, this has implications beyond internal processes. In the more connected environment in which national security decisions are made both within and outside the country—characterized by increased exposure to the interagency environment, the United Nations, and coalition nations—women's team building style may well gain more acceptance and better results than men's more autocratic leadership tendencies. Although men have for years been celebrated as “team players,” primarily because of their socialization in the dugouts and locker rooms of team sports, in reality, women's socialization has prepared them at least as well for building teams in the real world. Women's team socialization revolves around helping others to achieve their goals, celebrating others' achievements, and mentoring successors, thus passing on knowledge, power, and connections.<sup>46</sup> That women are more likely to behave this way does not mean that men do not behave this way; however, men are less likely to lead in this “relational” style than are women.

Women's team building skills and social sensitivity are a plus when dealing with people from cultures other than the Air Force, whether those cultures are from the State Department, a nongovernmental organization (NGO), or a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-partner nation. Modern war, as our experiences in the Persian Gulf, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan have taught us, is likely to be waged in an environment peopled by coalition partners and NGOs. The ability to forge a cohesive team from elements disparate as to culture and agenda will be key for future Air Force leaders. Obviously, the Air Force partners on occasion with nations whose citizens find it difficult to accept women in leadership roles. No one leader or leadership style is right for all situations. The broader the leadership options available to the Air Force, the more likely the Air Force is to achieve success in a wide variety of situations and missions.

Let me end with a word of caution: If inherently “female” leadership styles are an asset to an organization, the organization

must take care not to squelch those styles or force everyone into the same leadership mold. Some danger exists in the Air Force of women adopting more “masculine” leadership styles, either because that is what they observe most often or because those are the styles that reap visible and immediate rewards. This danger is especially acute since there is a dearth of women in senior leader roles who can mentor young lieutenants and captains coming up through the ranks and model leadership styles that may be different from the norm in the organization. It is possible that women attracted to military service may, naturally, exhibit more “masculine” leadership styles than the average, nonmilitary woman. In either case, the organization loses out if it implicitly or explicitly rewards only one or a handful of leadership styles.

#### Notes

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43. Lipman-Blumen, 184.

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45. Rosener, 120.

46. Lipman-Blumen, 197.

## Chapter 2

### Why Women Leave

Why a survey? Over the course of my 17 years in the Air Force, I have—quite naturally—engaged in a number of discussions with both men and women about their experiences in the Air Force, their aspirations and dreams, and their reasons for separating or retiring. It struck me that men and women left the Air Force for different reasons. The preponderance of women who left the Air Force prior to retirement eligibility—it seemed to me—did so because they wanted to start families, rear their children, or minimize the number of separations the family had to endure. Although I found that men also occasionally separated for family reasons, my observations suggested that men were more likely to leave to pursue other career opportunities or because they were dissatisfied with some specific aspect of their jobs or careers. Recognizing that policies and programs rarely get changed in response to anecdotes or “urban myths,” I decided to look for some data on the topic of retention, specifically retention until retirement eligibility for men and women.

My first stop was the Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC). Approximately every three years, AFPC personnel distribute a United States Air Force (USAF) career decisions survey to individuals who have submitted separation paperwork. Through this survey, AFPC attempts to determine why USAF personnel are separating. Reading through the survey, I was surprised to see that neither “starting a family” nor “staying home to rear children” was listed as a factor that might have prompted an individual’s decision to separate. The second surprise when reviewing AFPC’s survey was that their staff members sort the data only by officer and enlisted categories. They do *not* sort or analyze the data based on the gender of respondents.<sup>1</sup> When I expressed some surprise that the data is not analyzed by gender, Charles Hamilton of AFPC’s Survey Branch admitted that it might be useful to look at the data from a gender perspective. He

encouraged me to put together a survey and asked me to make the data I gathered available to AFPC.<sup>2</sup>

## **Hypotheses**

My primary hypothesis as I embarked on this project was that women separate from the active duty Air Force for primarily family-related reasons: they want to have children, stay home to care for them, or provide a more stable home environment. I hypothesized that women separate when the unique demands of the Air Force conflict too greatly with their role as child care providers. This conflict is more pertinent to women than men because women are still the primary child caregivers in our society, even in households where both parents work. The frequent geographic moves required by the Air Force, the long separations and extended duty hours—even during peacetime—place unique strains on a typical family. Although women are just as dedicated to their careers and to serving the country as men, they bear more of the strain of running the household and caring for the children and must, more often than men, choose between continuing an Air Force career and having a family. As one captain put it: “At the time I felt I had to choose my children or my job. . . . I had a great career. It’s a shame I couldn’t have done both.”<sup>3</sup>

Marriage statistics of male and female colonels bear out the idea that women more frequently have to choose between family and career. More than 95 percent of male colonels are married. Only 67 percent of female colonels are married.<sup>4</sup> One respondent to my survey, a reserve lieutenant colonel, also noticed this discrepancy. “If you look at the women who are E-8s and E-9s and O-5s and above, many of them are single. Or if they are married, few have children. It seems like women who want to make it into the higher ranks have to sacrifice their personal life for their career. Men who are in the higher ranks enjoy being married, having a family and having a career in the military.” Without objective data, it is impossible to ascertain whether this is true for women of equivalent status in the civilian sector. I suspect, however, that the difference in family status is not quite as stark because women in

civilian positions are unlikely to have to move as often and are thus able to build support networks to help with child rearing and family responsibilities. Additionally, civilian employers are more liable to offer flexible work schedules, telecommuting options, and other programs to reduce the conflict between work and family. They recognize that a contented, worry-free employee is a more productive employee.

My secondary hypothesis was that the military organizational, "cultural," climate is less comfortable for women than for men and that the strains and stresses of operating in a masculine culture combine with other factors to push women to separate at an earlier point than men. The mere collection of data cannot prove or disprove this hypothesis since many respondents might not be self-aware enough or reflective enough to pinpoint the organizational climate as a source of stress. Instances of blatant sexual discrimination or harassment would obviously fall into this category, but other, more subtle factors also belong here. For instance, language choices (*airmen*) and pejorative humor "Head? Who said head? I'll take some of that!" send signals of which the individual member may or may not be aware. The refusal of the military to produce battle dress uniforms in female sizes also sends a signal. I expected the comments on the surveys, more than the objective data, to reveal support for this hypothesis.

A corollary to my primary hypothesis is that if the Air Force were to institute programs and policies designed to reduce the conflict between career and family, it would be possible to retain more women longer. Let me hasten to add that I am not suggesting the Air Force make efforts to reduce this conflict at the expense of mission accomplishment. Rather, I submit that certain program and policy changes could be put in place that would make the military lifestyle more attractive to all members without decreasing military efficiency and effectiveness. In some cases, there might even be cost savings or efficiency gains associated with the new programs and policies. One respondent summed up the conflict quite succinctly: "Almost every woman I know who separated short of 20 did so for husband/children/parents/siblings. . . . When family needs conflict with the rigid Air Force assignment system, the Air Force loses

every time.” I contend it does not need to be a “win-lose” proposition every time.

## **Methodology**

In coordination with Air University and the AFPC, I constructed a survey (appendix A) to determine why women left the active duty Air Force prior to retirement eligibility and what new programs or policies might have influenced them to remain in the active duty Air Force. The instrument surveyed the women on some administrative data, their reasons for leaving the active duty Air Force, and their reaction to some possible program or policy changes. Part One of the survey requested administrative data. Part Two offered 10 factors that may have contributed to women’s decision to separate and asked them to rate the reasons on a scale of one to five. The scale measured the criticality of the item to their decision-making process. The number one meant the item did not contribute to the decision to leave, and a five meant the item was crucial to the decision.

The factors break out naturally into two primary groups: family-related reasons and career-related reasons. The family-related factors include

- starting a family,
- staying home with children, and
- spending more time with family (work hours were too long).

The career-related factors include pursuing civilian job opportunities to

- make more money,
- do more fulfilling work,
- move ahead quicker/further in the organization, and
- to work where cultural climate was more accepting of women (organizations recognized women’s contributions, sought to retain them, etc.).

The last two factors do not fit easily into either of the above categories. The desire for greater geographic stability (fewer moves) could derive from either family or career concerns. The final factor, dissatisfaction with Air Force leadership, could

drive a decision to separate even in the absence of family issues or an acknowledged desire to join the civilian workforce.

Part Three of the survey asked the women to rate possible program and policy changes on a scale of one to five with one meaning the change would have had no effect on their decision to separate and five meaning they would almost certainly have stayed in the active duty Air Force if that policy or program were in effect. I constructed the eight options through conversations with individuals considering separation and through research on corporate initiatives to boost retention. It is important to note that with the single exception of “flexible programs to support childbirth/nursing,” all of the below hypothetical program or policy changes are nongender specific. This is deliberate. Advocating for programs that might be perceived as favoring one demographic group over another is not in the Air Force’s best interests. Such programs would be antithetical to the Air Force ethos and detrimental in the long term. The possible changes the survey asked the women to rate include

- home basing to give more geographic stability;
- reliable, excellent child care;
- flexible programs to support childbirth and nursing;
- nonpunitive break in service opportunity to allow an individual to leave the active Air Force for one-to-five years to have children, care for an aging parent, write a book, complete a graduate degree, and so forth;
- better opportunities for jobs and promotions;
- higher pay;
- flexible job options (telecommuting one day a week, ability to move between active Air Force and Reserves, flex-time, etc.); and
- transferable GI Bill education benefits.

During the coordination process for survey approval, AFPC requested that I append the items from their 2000 USAF Career Decisions Survey on my survey. Thus, part four of the survey became a list of the items AFPC had previously identified as being factors in separation decisions. The women rated these factors using the same scale as in Part Two. In total, the survey asked 64 questions.

My original intent was to survey 1,000 women who had separated from the active duty Air Force during the past 20 years. The AFPC, however, informed me that the legal restrictions on a USAF member surveying a civilian (i.e., a woman who has separated from the Air Force and not remained affiliated with the military in any way) are significant. My timeline did not permit me to pursue the needed permissions from the Office of Management and Budget—a process AFPC said would take at least four months and would probably not result in approval. Additionally, AFPC would have been unable to provide accurate name and address data for women who separated from the active duty Air Force without remaining affiliated with the military. Thus, after consultation with AFPC, I decided to survey women who had separated from the active duty Air Force and elected to remain in the Air Force Reserves in some status. It is probable that excluding women who have completely separated from the military from the survey pool may have affected the results. However, it is virtually impossible to quantify in what way the results may have been affected. It is possible to postulate that the women who left the Air Force entirely may have been more inclined than were those in the survey pool to pursue civilian careers for a variety of reasons—pay, recognition, type of work, cultural climate. Nonetheless, it is equally likely that the women wanted to leave the workforce entirely, perhaps for family-related reasons. Therefore, although it is important that the survey pool does not include women who completely severed their connection with the military, it is impossible to assess how, or even if, that exclusion affects the results gathered during this survey.

AFPC supplied me with 1,000 names and addresses of officers who fit those criteria.<sup>5</sup> I distributed 992 surveys (appendix A) with a cover letter (appendix B) that explained my hypothesis and asked the women to assist me by filling out and returning the survey. I provided the women with an unstamped, self-addressed envelope in which to return the survey. Due to time and resource constraints, I did not send a follow-up letter. As it turned out, a follow-up letter was completely unnecessary!

## Results

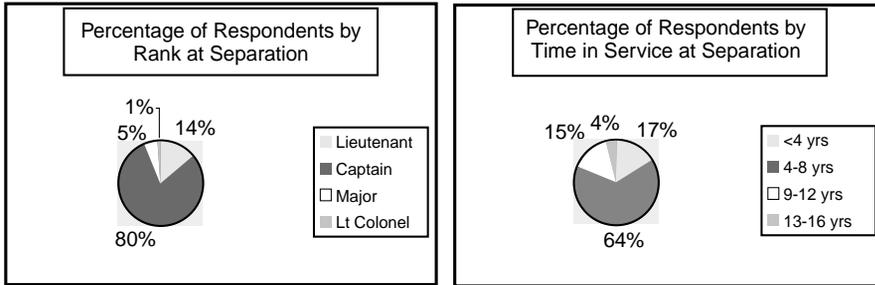
Of the 992 surveys sent out, I received 560 back completed, a better than 56 percent return rate. That return rate provides better than a 99.9 percent statistical confidence level that the results gathered reflect the views of the entire survey population. As a point of comparison, Survey Branch personnel at AFPC are “very happy” if they get a 33 percent return rate on their official surveys. The Survey Branch’s Charles Hamilton said that even a 50 percent return rate was “unheard of in our business.”<sup>6</sup>

The volume of returned surveys suggests that the topic resonated with many of the women who have separated from the Air Force. Their comments on the survey bear that out. “I never answer surveys,” says one doctor at the Pentagon, “but I think this one is very important.” Greater than 50 percent of the returned surveys had written comments on them, sometimes running to two or three typed pages. Although the survey did not request Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) data, the comments make it clear that women from many different career fields replied: intelligence officers, nurses, doctors, dentists, cops, missileers, pilots, lawyers, maintainers, engineers, acquisition officers, air battle managers, navigators, and many others. Women responded to this survey from virtually every state and many overseas locations, including locations in Southwest Asia and Guantanamo Bay, where they were supporting Operation Enduring Freedom.

Women who were involuntarily separated from the Air Force, most of them during the reduction-in-force effort of 1992, returned 12 of the surveys. I excluded their results from the data because an Air Force-directed separation did not meet the criteria of the study. Many of the surveys expressed delight that someone was looking into this topic and wished me “good luck” with the project.

## Reasons for Leaving the Air Force

Of the women who responded to the survey, the vast majority separated from the active duty Air Force as captains (79 percent) with four-to-eight years of service at the time of separation (65 percent). Figure 3 shows the distribution by rank

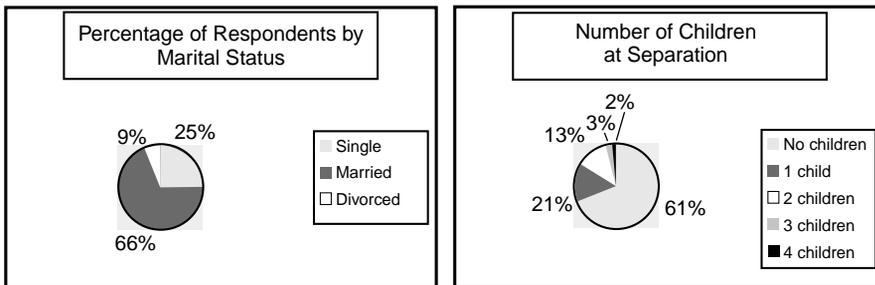


**Figure 3. Percentage of Respondents by Rank and Time in Service at Separation**

and time in service of the respondents. Sixty-six percent of the women were married at the time they separated, and a quarter of the respondents were single.

Somewhat surprisingly, in view of my hypothesis, 61 percent of the respondents had no children when they made the decision to separate. Figure 4 shows the breakout of respondents by marital status and the number of respondents who had zero to more than four children at the time of separation.

In terms of why women chose to separate from the active duty Air Force, the data bore out my primary hypothesis. More women chose to separate for family-related reasons than from the desire to pursue careers in the civilian sector. Twenty-four



**Figure 4. Percentage of Respondents by Marital Status and Number of Children**

percent of the respondents said that wanting to start a family was either a critical or significant factor in their decision to separate. Twenty-seven percent indicated that wanting to stay home with their children was a critical or significant factor, and 41 percent cited the need to spend more time with their families as a critical or significant factor in their separation decision. Only 8 percent cited child care availability as a critical or significant reason for leaving the active duty Air Force. Many respondents, in fact, praised the quality of Air Force child care: "The on-base CDCs [child development centers] are great," said one respondent. Another added, "DoD has *excellent* (superior) child care—it's the waiting lists and uncertainty of getting a slot that causes stress."

In terms of civilian job opportunities, only 12 percent of the respondents cited wanting to pursue a civilian job to make more money as a critical or significant factor, with 20 percent, 12 percent, and 11 percent, respectively, wanting to find a civilian job to do more fulfilling work, move ahead quicker/further, or find a more accepting organizational climate (table 1). In striking contrast, 61 percent of all officers responding to the *Report on Career Decisions in the Air Force: Results of the 2000 USAF Careers and New Directions Surveys* ranked "availability of comparable civilian jobs" as having a "very strong" or "strong" influence in their decision to leave the Air Force.<sup>7</sup> It was the number one reason officers chose to leave the Air Force.<sup>8</sup>

Forty-one percent of the respondents indicated a desire for more geographic stability as key to their decision making, and 27 percent pointed to dissatisfaction with the quality of Air Force leadership as a critical or significant contributor to their separation decision. When providing written comments, the respondents mentioned several other factors that influenced their decision making. Fully 52 percent of the respondents cited "compatibility with spouse's career/job" as a critical or significant factor in their decision to leave the active duty Air Force. Many added that the inability to get a guaranteed joint-spouse assignment influenced them to leave the Air Force.

By contrast, data from the 2000 *Report on Career Decisions in the Air Force* reveal that only 16 percent of all officers cite "compatibility with spouse's career/job" as having a "very

**Table 1**  
**Reasons for Leaving the Air Force**

Reasons for Leaving the Air Force	% Critical/Significant Factor	% Not a Factor
Start a family	24	60
Stay home with children	27	61
Spend more time with family	41	40
Child care	8	80
Civilian jobs (more money)	12	67
Civilian jobs (more fulfilling work)	20	61
Civilian jobs (move ahead)	12	72
Civilian jobs (better cultural climate)	11	70
Geographic stability	41	42
Dissatisfied with AF leadership	27	42

strong” or “strong” influence in their decision to leave the Air Force.<sup>9</sup> Other reasons cited include wanting to attend graduate school, write a book, or care for ill parents or special-needs children. Not being able to cross-train into other career fields or receive job-specific training were also factors, as were a lack of mentoring and being passed over for promotion.

For the women who responded to my survey and cited a family-related reason as the primary factor in their decision to leave the active duty Air Force, time away from family—both

because of long work hours and frequent temporary duty (TDY) or deployments—was a major factor. “I miss the camaradery [sic],” writes one woman, “but not the long hours. I worked with fantastic people, for the most part, however we worked long hours and trying to find time with family was difficult.” Although the Air Force has taken steps with the implementation of the Expeditionary Aerospace Force to make absences more predictable, the perception is that individuals still spend too much time deployed and may even be spending *more* time at the office when *not* deployed. “I love the people,” writes one Reserve nurse, “and working with professionals, but HATE the hours. 5/12s [five twelve-hour shifts] a week is too much for anyone.” The burdens on the typical Air Force couple or family are further exaggerated when both individuals are active duty members. “Dual active duty top performers see their kids for 1-1½ hours a day max,” says a woman who separated in 1992.

Moving too frequently and the subsequent rebuilding of support networks were also common stressors that led to separation decisions. Support networks are even more crucial in the military environment with its frequent deployments and TDYs than in a more static corporate environment, and the military’s penchant for moving people often makes the building and sustaining of those networks difficult. One respondent writes of the difficulty of finding quality child care and making arrangements for children who are ill and cannot attend their usual school or day care. “With every new assignment, one of the first things I do is try to line up people who can take care of my kids when they’re ill and can’t go to school because I can’t always stay home with them. But you don’t want to leave your kids with just anybody and it takes time to find someone you can trust. Just when I find someone the kids like and I trust, the military moves us again.” This theme is repeated often in the surveys, as respondents point out the time-consuming and stressful nature of finding new dentists, hair stylists, schools, veterinarians, and churches. The following comments are typical of those written by women who said that lack of geographic stability was a critical or significant factor in their decision to separate from the active duty Air Force.

- “The main reason I got out is I wanted to give my family the stability of living in one area.”
- “The main reason for separating was to settle down in one location with our growing family. PCS moves are tough with a lot of kids.”
- “Moving so much cut relationships or opportunity for relationships for me.”
- “I owe the AF alot [sic] for making me the person I am today . . . however, there has to be a trade-off here. For some people, it’s money or benefits. In my case, it’s keeping my family together (I’m talking peacetime here). My family helps keep me grounded and sane in the midst of the unpredictability of military life.”
- “My personal priority became offering a consistent ‘home-base’ for my husband, so I could at least see him when he wasn’t flying. If homebasing would have been offered to me by the AF, I definitely would have accepted it.”

It is difficult to determine why women separated to pursue civilian careers or why others left for family reasons because far fewer of them provided comments on the surveys. Additionally, this may be an area where the inability to survey women who have separated from the Air Force completely has impacted the results. However, for the roughly 12 percent of the women who said pursuing job opportunities was a critical or significant reason for separating from the active duty Air Force, the issue of control over their careers seemed to be paramount. “I like that I control my life now,” writes one woman now working in the civilian sector. Another individual writes, “Didn’t like the cut-throat competitiveness and control the leadership had over my career. Felt I had also no control over job choices.” “Having control over my career was the biggest reason I left,” writes a third woman. For the most part, these women offer no comments as to whether they are able to exercise more control over their careers in the civilian sector. One woman, however, writes, “I am quite satisfied with my decision to separate. I now teach middle school and am completing a [sic] MA in Administration. . . . When I was on active duty I was first an SP [Security Police officer] then Personnel.

There was never a sense of completion, just the same old stuff. Now I can be creative, and at the end of each class I can see the fruits of my labor.”

Several women also cited the desire to use skills they did not think the Air Force was capitalizing on: “The #1 thing the AF could have done to keep me is to allow me to work in a position that I had the skills to do vice things being rank-based. Basically, I *loved* active service, but was going to have to wait another 3–5 years to do a job that I would qualify easily for in the private sector.” A civil engineering captain says, “My whole job was just additional duties. I did no civil engineering work. I had 0% job satisfaction. *Major* factor for separating.” Along the same lines, some women were frustrated when they were moved up into leadership/managerial positions due to their rank. “Not everyone is a natural leader. I’m not. I know that. . . . It’s not something I aspire to, and I’m sure I’m not alone. But I do not consider myself a failure. I have made some very valuable contributions to the Air Force through less-visible but dedicated efforts. What’s so wrong with simply wanting to serve your country?” That theme emerged several times in the survey comments. “My career goal is to be a practicing nurse,” writes one woman, “just like a pilot who does not want to fly a desk. I don’t want to lead/command a hospital or clinic, I want to practice.” As this woman implicitly points out, frustration with being moved from a “doer” role to a “leader” role is not limited to one career field or one gender.

A variety of other reasons also propelled women from the Air Force into the private sector, ranging from their desire to pursue personal goals to a mismatch between career expectations and reality, to their frustration with the “glass ceiling.”

- “Want to be more of a woman than the AF culture encourages.”
- “Wanted to pursue art-based career not available in AF.”
- “My reasons for leaving active duty were simple: I was planning for a challenging career in systems procurement and instead was put in a SAC [Strategic Air Command] motor pool.”
- “Lack of opportunity for advancement.”
- “No strong female role models.”

- “I wanted to be in an environment where the abilities of women were recognized and opportunities were present regardless of sex. I also wanted to have the ‘glass ceiling’ factor removed for both the day-to-day job aspects and the educational aspects. I wanted to be in an environment that supported women.”

One factor that did *not* push women from the Air Force into the private sector was pay. One software engineer’s comments were atypical: “As a technical person in the software engineering field the timing was key to me leaving active duty Air Force. I was able to triple my salary and greatly improve my living conditions.” More commonly, women pointed out that they were actually paid more in the Air Force than in their civilian jobs. This seems to be significantly different from the male experience where men leaving the Air Force do so in the expectation of receiving a higher paycheck. The 2000 *Report on Career Decisions in the Air Force* found that only 6 percent of the company grade officers and none of the field graders expected to make less in the civilian sector than in the military. Fully 19 percent of the company grade nonpilots and 60 percent of the company grade pilots expected to earn at least \$50,000 more in a civilian job than in the military.<sup>10</sup>

“Dissatisfied with quality of AF leadership” was tied with “wanted to stay home with children” as the third most significant factor in women’s decisions to separate prior to retirement eligibility. Twenty-seven percent of the women surveyed said that dissatisfaction with leadership overall was a “critical” or “significant” factor in their separation decision. Sixteen percent called “leadership at MAJCOM/HQ USAF level” a “critical” or “significant” factor, while 21 percent cited “leadership at the unit level” the same way. Interestingly, these figures are somewhat lower than the figures from the 2000 *Report on Career Decisions in the Air Force*. For all officers responding to that survey, 31 percent cited “leadership at wing or equivalent level” as a “very strong” or “strong” factor in their decision to leave, while 27 percent cited “leadership at MAJCOM/HQ USAF level.”<sup>11</sup>

For women, harassment and discrimination issues played a role in their dissatisfaction with leadership. Surprisingly, this

seemed to be just as true for women who separated within the last 10 years as for women who separated much earlier. One comment from a woman who separated in 1996 pointed to the “good ol’ boy network” as a problem in today’s military. “I saw many times the good ole boy system at work—I felt women had to work twice as hard for the same recognition, ratings, special considerations etc. as my male counterparts.” Another woman echoed that view: “[I] saw too many of the wrong things getting rewarded in the exclusive good-ol’-boy club.” Another woman complained about “2 commanders in a row with very subtle/non-provable bias against women in AF.” A woman who separated in 2001 continued this theme: “My last boss drove me out—biggest male chauvinist pig I’ve ever met.” A lieutenant who separated in 1992 cited her social actions case against a lieutenant colonel as the primary reason. She says, “When women are discriminated against, they shouldn’t be treated as a criminal when they won’t stand for it.” A captain from Maryland says her number one reason for leaving was “gender discrimination in my career field—substantiated—boss was even disciplined!”

Others had more generic misgivings about the quality of Air Force leadership. “There are far *too* many unethical, immoral activities the leadership participates in, turns a blind eye to or encourages. I am disgusted with the quality of leadership in the military,” writes one woman. Another condemns leaders’ self-promotion: “The entire system is set up to reward square-fillers, brown-nosers, and self-promoters, not truly talented, able people who dare to take risks. The ‘one mistake’ AF is a huge mistake!” One former missileer and now DOD contractor thinks Air Force leadership has descended to the lowest common denominator: “I think the missile ‘checklist’ mentality has dummy’d down our folks. Not sure why leadership has followed.” Many women cited a dearth of mentoring as a severe leadership lack: “My career field eats their young,” says one woman from an unidentified AFSC. “My leadership—unit and higher—did NOTHING to mentor/protect me from that.” A woman from one of the medical career fields relays a particularly poignant story about the effect of poor leadership:

My father was diagnosed with terminal cancer. While I was able to get a humanitarian reassignment 300 miles away from my father's house, I was only able to see him a couple of times due to the inflexible scheduling. In fact the day he died, I worked my entire 8 hour shift (I had told everyone that he was being taken to hospice that day, so they were all aware of the situation) and no one offered to let me leave early to see him before he died. . . . By the time I got home, my Dad was dead.<sup>12</sup>

The comments about leadership were not all negative. Several women lauded the excellence of Air Force leadership and compared it favorably to leadership found in the civilian world. One woman remarks, "If Reserve leadership had the integrity of senior leaders found on active duty I'd be happier." Although this paper does not propose any means of addressing the dissatisfaction with leadership issues, I thought it was important to include the above perspectives.

Other than in the leadership arena, there are several retention-related lessons to be learned from the data collected by this survey. First, the Air Force can focus its retention efforts on decreasing the conflict between having/caring for families and fulfilling military duties rather than on making the military look attractive in comparison to civilian opportunities. The Air Force has historically been focused on the latter, perhaps because men are more likely to respond to increases in pay and allowances. For instance, the Air Force distributes to all personnel a yearly document that highlights the value of Air Force pay and benefits. My research suggests that such a document is not very useful as a tool for retaining women. I am not intimating the Air Force discontinue the practice of distributing that information; I am pointing out that the Air Force needs to recognize that the tools and practices that help retain men may not be as effective at retaining women. Second, for the most part, increases in pay or bonuses are not significant motivating factors for women. Only 4 percent of the women said pay and allowances were a critical factor in their decision to separate from the active duty Air Force. More women (6 percent) cited the opportunity for education and training as a critical reason for separation than cited pay and allowances! Clearly, the Air Force needs to look beyond remuneration issues to lifestyle and job satisfaction issues when crafting programs to retain women.

## Retention Measures

This section discusses the rankings of the proposed retention measures. See table 2 for a summary of retention measure rankings. The following chapter discusses possible implementation of some of those measures.

Of the eight proposed programs or policy changes offered on the survey, “Availability of flexible job options (telecommuting one day a week, ability to move between active Air Force and Reserves, flextime, etc.)” emerged as the program change most likely to retain women. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents said they “probably would have stayed in the AF” were flexible job options available, and 27 percent said these options would have had a “significant impact” on their decision making. Equally significantly, only 12 percent of the women said that this retention measure would have had “no impact” on their decision to leave the active duty Air Force. The comments revealed that the flexible job option most desired by far was the ability to

**Table 2**  
**Effects of Retention Measures**

Retention Measures	% Probably Stayed or Significant Impact	% No Impact
Home basing	38	29
Child care	18	57
Childbirth/nursing programs	21	59
Break in service (nonpunitive)	58	20
Better opportunity for jobs/promotions	32	34
Higher pay	23	38
Flexible job options/active vs Reserves	64	12
Transferable GI Bill benefits	16	62

move between the active duty Air Force and the Reserves. Almost no comments referred to the telecommuting or flextime options.

The second most popular retention measure, the “Non-punitive break in service opportunity,” is fairly similar to the first option. “A break-in-service program would have worked best for me, but the Air Force (at least in 1998) did not honor the Family Leave Act (12 weeks nonpaid time off). If they had recognized the Family Leave program, I may have stayed,” writes one captain from Virginia. An equal number of women (37 percent) said such an opportunity probably would have kept them on active duty, while 21 percent said a nonpunitive break in service would have had a “significant impact” on their decision making. Essentially, the ability to move between the active duty Air Force and Reserves and the opportunity for a nonpunitive break in service meet the same needs. They give members the ability to deconflict their personal/family lives and their careers on either a short- or a long-term basis. Those with short-term conflicts (need to care for a terminally ill parent, desire to get a graduate degree, religious requirement to serve a year as a missionary, etc.) gravitate toward the non-punitive break in service opportunity. Those with longer term conflicts, primarily the desire to rear children to school age, are attracted to the option of moving between the active duty Air Force and Reserves. Both programs offer the Air Force a stellar opportunity to retain quality men and women, enable better manpower planning, boost members’ loyalty, and capitalize on training investment.

The third most popular option was home basing because it offers the most stability geographically. Sixteen percent of the women surveyed said they probably would have stayed in the active duty Air Force if a home-basing program were available. Twenty-two percent said a home-basing option would have had a significant impact on their decision making. The Air Force already offers some home-basing options for the enlisted corps. It is time to see how such a program might be implemented for the officer corps, as well.

Of the possible changes listed on the survey, “transferable GI Bill education benefits” offers the least impact as a retention measure. Only 16 percent of the respondents said that

benefit probably would have made them stay or had a significant impact on their decision making. Further, 62 percent said it would have had no impact. Somewhat surprisingly, “Availability of reliable, excellent child care” and “Flexible programs to support childbirth/nursing” received only lukewarm support in comparison to the other measures, with 18 percent and 21 percent of the women, respectively, saying those programs would have convinced them to remain in the Air Force or would have had a significant impact on their decision making. The comments suggest that many women feel the Air Force already provides excellent child care and reasonable programs to support childbirth and nursing. Many women revealed, however, that they think a six-week maternity leave is far too short.

Rather contradictorily, given earlier comments and analysis, 23 percent of the respondents say “higher pay” would have kept them in the active duty Air Force or significantly impacted their decision making. Drawing from the fact that not very many women cited pay and allowances as a reason for leaving the Air Force (only 4 percent) and considering the comments on the survey, I tend to discount somewhat the incentive value of higher pay for women. Essentially, I think no one objects on principle to the concept of higher pay for themselves, and the rankings indicate it would have more value as a retention tool for women than is, in fact, the case.

In sum, women who leave the active duty Air Force prior to retirement eligibility do so primarily to spend more time with their families and fulfill family responsibilities but also for opportunities in the civilian sector. Thus, the retention measures most likely to keep them in include those that help deconflict family and military responsibilities. The next chapter discusses these measures in more detail.

### Notes

1. Air Force Personnel Center, *Report on Career Decisions in the Air Force: Results of the 2000 USAF Careers and New Directions Surveys* (Randolph Air Force Base [AFB], Tex.: AFPC, 30 November 2000).
2. Charles H. Hamilton, AFPC Survey Branch, interviewed by author, n.d.

3. This paper contains numerous direct quotations from the survey and statistics calculated from the survey answers. These quotations and statistics are given in the text but most have no note citations. The original survey materials are retained in the author's personal collection.

4. These statistics from AFPC might be interpreted in other ways. Perhaps women who embrace an Air Force career are less inclined than the general population to want a husband and family. Perhaps women executives of an equivalent standing in civilian corporations are equally as unlikely to have families as the military women. I suspect, however, that for the majority, it is just too hard to fulfill family and military duties, and they are forced to choose. Male military members usually are not forced to choose because a greater percentage of them have stay-at-home or noncareer-oriented spouses who take care of household and child responsibilities. See Directorate of Personnel Operations, Headquarters Air Force Personnel Center, "Personnel Statistics Website—Officer Demographics," n.p., n.d., on-line, Internet, available from <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/demographics>.

5. I only surveyed officers because the focus of the study is on retaining women who are in a position to achieve the rank of general and be among the Air Force's senior leaders. Additionally, a greater percentage of women attain the highest enlisted rank, chief master sergeant, than even attain the rank of colonel.

6. Charles H. Hamilton, E-mail to author, 2 February 2002.

7. I will be using the results of this survey, Air Force Personnel Center, *Report on Career Decisions in the Air Force: Results of the 2000 USAF Careers and New Directions Survey* (Randolph AFB, Tex.: AFPC, 30 November 2000), as a comparison point to show the differences between male and female reasons for separating from the Air Force prior to reaching retirement eligibility. This survey is not an ideal instrument for drawing comparisons because it combines men's and women's results; thus, the percentages in the text also represent women's responses. However, of the 3,886 officers who responded to this survey, the likelihood is that only 10–12 percent were women, so the results reflect primarily the male bias. AFPC has acknowledged the need to break out the data by male-female on future surveys.

8. *Report on Career Decisions*, 35.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, 10.

11. *Ibid.*, 35.

12. A significant number of the comments about poor leadership came from women in the medical career fields. "AF nursing leadership is hit or miss, mostly non-existent [sic]," reports one woman. This might be an area for further investigation.

## Chapter 3

### **Usefulness and Feasibility of Retention Measures**

The Air Force does not *want* to retain everyone. Some people do not adapt well to military life, some have disciplinary or quality force issues, and some are not competent. The Air Force evaluation and promotion systems do a pretty good job of weeding those people out. The Air Force also cannot retain everyone. One response from a woman in New Mexico makes that clear: “There is nothing the Air Force could have done to make me stay in. It is just more important to me to raise my children to be good citizens.”<sup>1</sup> Others leave because the Air Force cannot pay them as much as Delta or American Airlines does for the same skills. That still leaves a sizable body of Air Force members who are “on the fence” about staying in the Air Force or separating. Some of them ride that fence for years; others make a clear commitment to the long haul or jump off the fence into (supposedly) greener pastures.

It is the fence riders that the below retention measures target. The Air Force needs to tap into what turns a fence rider into someone willing to commit for the long haul. I suggest the answer lies in boosting an individual’s loyalty to the Air Force by helping the individual to deconflict personal and professional responsibilities. “Service before self” is a value most Air Force members embrace wholeheartedly. “Service before family”—especially during peacetime—is more difficult. “Service instead of family” drives people out. An old saying suggested, “If the Army had wanted you to have a family, it would have issued you one.” Since 71.5 percent of Air Force officers have families, that view is outdated and dangerous to military retention and effectiveness.<sup>2</sup> Families give people stability. They give them the love and support that help them deal with crises at work. They give them the incentive to fight and die, if necessary, to preserve our culture and way of life. The Air Force has a vested interest in helping its members nurture their families.

The following retention measures meet that goal. Of the eight suggested retention measures, this paper addresses in some detail the options with the greatest potential impact on retention—nonpunitive break in service, the opportunity to move between the active force and the Reserves, and home basing. Such measures as childbirth and nursing programs, although of lesser impact, are easier to implement and are covered briefly. Higher pay is not a feasible option and would not, in any case, significantly increase the retention of women and thus does not merit discussion here. Transferable GI Bill benefits, while relatively easy to implement, does not have enough retention impact to warrant discussion. Better opportunity for jobs and promotions received some support from the women surveyed (table 2), but is connected to the leadership issues mentioned earlier and is beyond the scope of this paper. This paper does not attempt to work out all the details of the suggested programs. It provides a rough outline for further development and implementation by personnel specialists and others involved in manning and force structure fields.

### **Home Basing**

Home basing involves assigning a military member to the same base or location for an extended period of time. In the Air Force enlisted assignment system, individuals can apply for home basing following the completion of a short tour. In other words, they can ask for an assignment back to the base where they were assigned before departing for the short tour. If approved, the home-basing program conceivably allows members and their families 8–10 years at the same location, with only a year for the member overseas. The program is known as the Base of Preference or Follow-On Assignment Opportunity. MSgt Jerry Tapia, chief of Training Issues and Procedures in the Airmen Assignments Branch at AFPC, stated that his office processes, on average, 500 applications a month for this program. The office approves 93–94 percent of the requests. The effects of this program on retention are unknown, however, because the Air Force did not institute it to encourage

reenlistment, according to Master Sergeant Tapia, and has not measured its effects on retention.<sup>3</sup>

The program is not currently available for officers. Officers, however, are interested in home basing. Of 3,795 officers completing a 1999 AFPC survey about home basing, 83 percent overwhelmingly liked the concept. The majority of personnel (76 percent of officers) would want to remain at a home-base location for 5–12 years.<sup>4</sup>

The potential benefits of home basing are many. It gives the member and family the opportunity to develop roots in a community and a support network. I contend that having a semi-permanent support network probably reduces absenteeism by cutting stress and giving families options during illness or crisis. For instance, if a child is ill and cannot go to school, someone in the support network may be able to care for the child, freeing the member to go to work. Also, in the event of a death or other crisis in the family, having friends, neighbors, and familiar clergy will reduce stress for the effected individual, allowing the member to return to work sooner and be more productive. The Air Force reaps benefits beyond the reduction in stress for its members and the subsequent decline in absenteeism. Home basing cuts permanent change of station costs because individuals do not move as often. Currently, the average PCS cost associated with moving an officer within the continental United States is \$11,215. Moving that same officer to an overseas assignment costs \$17,387.<sup>5</sup> The Air Force stands to save up to \$51,000 per officer by reducing the number of moves by two or three over the course of an officer's career. Additionally, it has the potential to build some valuable continuity at the base. The member can acquire a level of expertise in 8–10 years that is not possible in a three to four year assignment, even if the job switches during that time.

The home-basing initiative as I envision it has six primary tenets.

- Home basing should be made available to eligible officers after their first operational (nontraining) assignment. To be eligible, the individual must have acceptable performance reports and no negative quality force indicators.

- Home basing should be designed to retain people through the 12-year point, after which separation declines probably due to financial losses incurred through sacrificing retirement benefits.
- The Air Force should specify, perhaps by career field, which bases are open for home-basing assignments.
- The officer may be asked to take a remote tour, or a non-desirable tour, to qualify for home basing, similar to the system currently in effect for enlisted personnel.
- Officers should understand that in time of war, they are vulnerable to assignment as and where the Air Force needs them.
- The Air Force should specify some factors that would be grounds for terminating home-basing assignments, including base closures or loss of authorizations.

The two most common arguments against instituting a home-basing program for officers include needs of the Air Force and career progression. Clearly, the Air Force cannot afford to limit its assignment flexibility relative to individuals so that it impacts Air Force mission accomplishment, nor can it afford to hamstring officer development programs so that officers have no breadth or depth of experience. Neither of those negative consequences has to result from a properly implemented home-basing program for officers. The program, as outlined above, will be available only for a selected part of an officer's career, from roughly the four-year point to the 12-year point. Further, not all officers will be interested in home basing. Both of these factors limit the potential negative effect on assignment flexibility and officer development.

Recent changes in Air Force structure and organization make it easier to implement a home-basing program. The draw-down of the 1990s and the subsequent base closures have resulted in the collocation of many echelons of command and many different unit types at single bases. This trend of base consolidation is likely to continue for the foreseeable future as the fielding of such weapons systems as the B-2 makes overseas bases less necessary and as the cost—both monetary and political—of keeping overseas bases open continues to rise.

Some bases have every echelon of command from squadron to major command (MAJCOM). Several others go from squadron to numbered air force with a variety of field operating agencies or direct reporting units also colocated. There are ample opportunities at these bases for individuals to gain breadth and depth of experience, even to career broaden, in line with the Developing Aerospace Leaders program construct. For instance, following completion of intelligence training, an intelligence officer could start her operational life in an F-15 squadron at Langley, move to the wing as she pins on captain, serve as an executive officer to a general as a midlevel captain, and then work a programming job at Air Combat Command headquarters as a senior captain or junior major. Or, an F-16 pilot's first assignment could be to a squadron at Kunsan Air Base, Korea, a remote tour. He could then enter the home-basing program with a follow-on to Hill, where he could serve in a squadron, and then any number of group- or wing-level positions. By the time these officers are ready for Air Staff or joint staff experience, their home-basing tours would be completed, and they would have considerable depth in their primary AFSC, as well as some breadth, if required. There are many possibilities.

A home-basing program for officers has significant potential as a retention tool. Home basing will accomplish the dual goals of helping to decrease the family-career conflict many officers experience and provide the Air Force sufficient flexibility for assigning people to meet mission requirements and officer development needs. Additionally, it will allow for a significant cost savings on PCS moves. The Air Force has nothing to lose and much to gain by investigating this concept in more depth.

### **Sabbatical/Break in Service Opportunity**

Surveyed members expressed significant support for a non-punitive break in service option as a retention tool. A break in service is not a completely new concept. The Air Force has allowed individuals to leave the service and return, but it is not done routinely, the return is not preplanned, and the returning members frequently find themselves looked at askance by

promotion boards. Such a system offers few advantages to either the individual or the Air Force. I propose two separate systems, each offering the advantages of helping to retain qualified, talented individuals; giving the Air Force more flexibility and lead-time for manning decisions; and reducing costs for accession and training. The first plan, a one-year paid sabbatical, would allow individuals with short-term conflicts who need time away from their careers to cope with personal issues: caring for a terminally ill parent, finishing a graduate degree, or bearing and nursing a baby. The second plan would allow for a one- to five-year preplanned break in service, unpaid, to cope with such longer term conflicts as raising children to school age, doing charity/missionary work, interning in the corporate world, or allowing a spouse to pursue career goals.

Existing programs within the Air Force attempt to alleviate some of the conflict between careers and personal lives but are not sufficient. These programs include emergency leave, humanitarian reassignment, convalescent leave, and educational leave of absence. Emergency leave allows an individual to be absent from the duty station for up to 60 days to deal with an urgent personal situation and is sufficient only for a short-term, resolvable situation. Humanitarian reassignment is designed to help members who have a family member that needs extraordinary support of one kind or another. It places the member at the closest location to the family member who needs support. Unfortunately, that may still be several hundred miles away from the family member, and the individual is still responsible for Air Force duties. Convalescent leave supports the member with personal health problems and is not charged as leave to the member. Finally, the educational leave of absence is a program requiring secretary of the Air Force approval. It allows a member to pursue an educational program for up to two years, while still receiving basic pay. The payback is two months for each month's absence. According to Mary Lee Baker, an Air Staff expert, the program is rarely used.<sup>6</sup> This may be because few people have heard of it and not because members are not interested in such an opportunity. I randomly questioned 20 Air War College classmates,

and none were familiar with the program or knew it was available.

The corporate and academic worlds are well ahead of the military in designing sabbatical or leave of absence programs to help retain their personnel. Educational institutions have, for years, offered paid sabbaticals as incentives to their qualified professors. The corporate world is following suit. In a survey of 754 companies with an average of 1,600 employees, the Society for Human Resource Management found that 19 percent offered a paid sabbatical.<sup>7</sup> As the Air Force fights to win the war for talent, it must optimize the benefits it offers to compete with the civilian sector. And, as the surveys demonstrate, members value the opportunity of time away from the job more than they value the prospect of a higher paycheck.

The keys to success for both the one-year sabbatical and the long break in service are *pre-planning* and *guaranteed return of the member*. The Air Force may or may not want to specify what kinds of reasons qualify for approval of the sabbatical or the break in service. Both programs would require an approval process involving the MAJCOM and AFPC. For the sabbatical, the affected unit would also be in the approval chain. Additionally, the requesting member must have served a first term of commitment to qualify for the sabbatical, must have satisfactory evaluations, and must have no negative quality force indicators. The payback for the paid sabbatical would be similar to the payback for educational opportunities in the Air Force: three months' commitment for every one month away.

The apparent drawback to this plan is cost. However, it is not as costly as it first appears, especially when one factors in the cost of recruiting and training a replacement for an individual who separates. Let us consider one example. Captain Wong, a 13S1/space and missile officer needs a year off to care for a mother dying of cancer. She submits her paperwork for a year's paid sabbatical through the appropriate channels and AFPC approves it. At her own cost, she returns to the town where her mother lives and nurses her until she passes away, settles the estate, and returns to the Air Force after eight months. During that time she has received her base pay with no allowances and has not accrued any leave. The eight

months have cost the Air Force \$29,584 in base pay. By retaining Captain Wong, the Air Force has saved the \$33,758 it cost for her initial skills training as a space and missile officer, as well as the \$230,000 her Air Force Academy education cost.<sup>8</sup> The Air Force also benefits from additional savings in terms of experience, upgrade training, and professional military education.

The break-in-service program would have a similar structure. Individuals must serve at least eight years to qualify for a guaranteed-return break in service, have good evaluations, and have no negative quality force indicators. That ensures people taking advantage of the program are the ones the Air Force wants to retain—quality performers with a history of service and commitment. While there would be no payback for the break in service, per se, the individuals' retirement date would slip by the number of months they were away from the Air Force. To ensure their return, they would be required to sign a contract departure, promising to return on a specific date. The delayed entry program contract might be a model. Accrued retirement benefits are the hook that would persuade members to sign such a contract. After an absence of one to five years, the members would start where they left off in terms of rank, promotion opportunity, and retirement benefits.

For instance, if Captain Garcia took three years off to raise her two-year-old twins to school age, she would sign a contract agreeing to return on 1 September 2005. Until then, she receives no pay or allowances (unless she enters the Air Force Reserve, as discussed in an earlier section). Knowing she is going to return, the Air Force can adjust its recruiting numbers and assignment process to reflect her availability in 2005. Upon her return, she has the same number of years of time in service and time in grade as she did upon her departure, as well as the same amount of accrued leave and retirement benefits. The Air Force benefits by decreased perturbation in the accession and assignment processes. Even more significantly, the Air Force benefits by not losing 10 years worth of accrued experience and training, even if Captain Garcia needs a refresher course to renew her skills when she returns.

## **Permeability of Active-Reserve Barrier**

Changing the nature of the relationship between the active duty Air Force and the Air Force Reserve Component (ARC) offers significant opportunity for long-term retention of talented individuals in the active force. The procedural changes to accomplish this are challenging enough; the attitude changes may be insuperable. However, the reasons for making such a change go well beyond encouraging retention. Although this paper's purpose is not to design a new structure for the Air Force Reserves, a brief look at the forces driving changes in the ARC and some possible aspects of its restructure are appropriate. Changing the relationship between the active force and the Reserves entails a new way of thinking about how our forces are composed and structured. This kind of organizational change, to my mind, offers as much opportunity for a revolution in military affairs as any technological innovation. Two primary factors converge to make the first decade of the twenty-first millennium the right time to change the way the Air Force manages its human resources.

First, the nature of warfare is changing. The increasing globalization of the world connects the United States with other countries in ways we never imagined. We can no longer drop a bomb in a seemingly insignificant country without feeling the reverberations at home. The media amplifies the shock waves, and the vibrations have the potential to shake up our economy, our reputation on the international scene, and our military/diplomatic alliances. Witness the effect of bombing the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. Dropping hot burning metal on target may no longer be the most effective way of prevailing in a conflict, at least not in all instances. Advances in information warfare (IW) make possible attacks against enemy centers of gravity that are potentially crippling and nonattributable. In the not-too-distant future, IW capabilities may call into question the need to maintain large kinetic forces for use against any but noninformationalized targets. (Noninformationalized countries may be to the twenty-first century what nonindustrialized countries were to the twentieth century.) The nature of warfare is also changing in that conventional force-on-force engagements between nation-states have been superseded, for the moment,

by asymmetric warfare against nonstate actors. The global war on terrorism (GWOT), which President George W. Bush says will last for years, is the prime example.

Second, this war on terrorism is revealing weaknesses in the way the Air Force is organized and structured. The vast majority of our airlift and tanker assets reside in the ARC. The nation has tasked these assets heavily in our fight in Afghanistan, putting a huge burden on our ARC and Air National Guard personnel. The burden extends beyond the individuals themselves, and even beyond their families, to their employers and the economy. Since most reservists and Guard personnel have full-time careers in the civilian sector, their deployment in time of conflict has many repercussions. If the whole nation mobilized for war, the existing structure might work better because employers would understand and applaud their Reserve employees' absences. In the current situation, however, the initial support for the GWOT must begin to fade as employers feel the pinch in their purses. The reservists themselves are also feeling pinched. They may leave in large numbers at the first opportunity, unable to tolerate the strain on their professional and private lives. If the GWOT goes on at its current tempo for even another year, never mind another three to five years, the Air Force will *have* to find another way to manage its personnel resources.

Restructuring of the relationship between the ARC and the active force is part of the solution to some of these problems. The Air Force needs to do a hard assessment of what functions belong in the ARC as it currently exists. Additionally, the Air Force needs to take advantage of the huge advances in computer and communications technologies to enable large parts of the Reserves, and possibly the active force, to work from geographically separated locations. The Reserves have a policy that allows telecommuting on a case-by-case basis. But this policy does not capitalize on existing technologies by creating virtual Reserve units or other elements. No serious doctrinal thought or innovative ways of doing business underpin the existing policy on telecommuting.

Finally, the Air Force needs to allow for transfer of personnel from the active force to the Reserves and back again.

The increased integration enabled by such a mechanism would have significant advantages. It would be a potential means of retaining the talented and experienced individuals the Air Force should want to keep. Allowing members to move from the active force into the Reserves for up to four years might give them the opportunity to complete graduate school, write a book, care for terminally ill parents, have a baby, or gain some experience in a new skill while remaining an Air Force asset that could be tapped in time of war. In short, integration would have many of the same advantages as the one-year sabbatical and break in service, with the additional benefit of providing the member with some contact with his or her career field and training during the time away from the active force. Additionally, it would create the opportunity for a reservist to move into an active duty slot for up to four years, as they are now eligible to do by way of Title 10 tours. However, this program would require a longer lead-time, thus enabling better force planning, as the example that follows illustrates.

Captain Smith, a communications officer, wants to move from the active force to the ARC for two years to obtain a graduate degree. A year in advance of leaving his current position, he obtains approval through his chain of command and AFPC. AFPC searches its files and contacts appropriate personnel currently serving in the ARC to determine whether they can backfill for Captain Smith. Six months later, Captain Smith goes off to Harvard and begins working on weekends with his Reserve unit. Captain Jones in-processes at Captain Smith's old office. This serves the needs of the unit, the Air Force as a whole, and the two individuals. Captain Smith attains his personal goal of a master's degree from Harvard, and the Air Force benefits from his expanded worldview and improved thinking abilities when he returns. Captain Jones receives updated training and experience with an operational unit that will better prepare her to fulfill wartime responsibilities. The unit has continuous coverage of Captain Smith's position.

Breaking down the barrier between the active force and the Reserves integrates the "whole force" more seamlessly, giving folks primarily involved with the active Air Force the opportunity to experience the Reserves and become familiar with the

concerns and issues of reservists and giving reservists better opportunities for training and operational experience. Since the Reserves and Guard make up one-third of our Air Force capability, all senior leaders should spend a tour in one or the other.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, allowing more movement to and from the Reserves would help remove some of the perception of the Reserves as “second class citizens.” Several of the survey comments speak to this perception; the reservists do not think they get sufficient opportunity for training and development.<sup>10</sup>

Several barriers prevent implementing this proposal. The active force and Reserve pay, evaluation, and promotion systems need to be aligned. Additionally, the personnel experts need to devise a formula for calculating retirement points and years for *all* members. The formula should account for a mix of active and Reserve time. Maj Gen Robert McIntosh, the Reserve advisor to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in an interview that the Air Force has been investigating a concept incorporating similar ideas. Unfortunately, the next update on the study team’s progress is not due until two weeks after this writing.<sup>11</sup> The effort would be well worth it. A true “whole force” concept as proposed above provides better manning flexibility, more depth and breadth of experience throughout the whole force, better standardization of training and experience, better understanding of all force elements, and improved retention.

### **Childbirth/Nursing Programs**

Childbirth is a natural event in the lives of many women. Air Force professionals are no exception. Yet, many Air Force supervisors and leaders penalize women, usually in subtle ways, for becoming pregnant. They certainly do not offer enthusiastic support for the pregnant member. Additionally, the Air Force system as a whole seems nonplussed when a woman becomes pregnant. The Air Force immediately offers the woman the opportunity to separate without penalty, as if pregnancy were on a par with some permanent, disqualifying medical condition. Unsubstantiated rumors abound about women

getting pregnant to avoid distasteful assignments or deployments. Pregnancy, in most cases, can be planned by both the individual and the Air Force. Such planning can minimize impacts to readiness and mission accomplishment. The impacts to morale, readiness, and retention caused by the Air Force's posture related to pregnancy are mostly avoidable through the implementation of common sense policies and programs and education of supervisors and members at all levels.

First, the Air Force should discontinue the practice of almost automatically letting pregnant women separate. The perturbation in the manning and assignment systems caused by unanticipated separations is significant. There is no medical reason for granting an automatic separation, anymore than there is a medical reason for letting a man separate because he broke a leg. Both broken legs and pregnancies are temporary conditions.

Second, the Air Force needs to build and launch a campaign to educate supervisors at all levels about pregnancy and the likely impact to the individual and the unit. Dispelling myths about pregnancy and readiness should be a key part of such a campaign. Supervisors should be encouraged to provide support to the individual, not to treat her with morale-impacting "favoritism" or pretend she is not pregnant. If a medical reason exists for curtailing certain duties, the supervisor and commander need to be fully informed.

Third, the Air Force, perhaps assignment personnel and commanders, should encourage women to discuss their pregnancy plans and try to time assignments around pregnancies, or vice versa. For instance, I volunteered for a remote assignment to Korea as a senior lieutenant to receive credit for a remote assignment before starting a family. I also know several women who planned their pregnancies to coincide with professional military education assignments to avoid impacting the operational mission. Obviously, the Air Force cannot dictate when or if a woman becomes pregnant (although it might consider having women pilots sign an agreement not to get pregnant for five years after completing pilot training). Equally obvious, assignments cannot always—or even usually—be worked around pregnancies; however, with appropriate mentoring, women may

be more inclined to work their pregnancies around assignments to the benefit of the individual and the Air Force. Perhaps this should be an item for discussion during feedback sessions.

Fourth, the Air Force should encourage women to breast-feed. Medical personnel, commanders, and other mentors should make this a priority. A plethora of research documents that breast-fed babies get sick less often than babies who are bottle-fed. The highly respected American Academy of Pediatrics and American Dietetic Society both endorse breast-feeding to the one-year point.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, breast-fed babies incur fewer health care costs. Since the Air Force is paying for family member health care, it has a vested interest in encouraging breast-feeding. It is impossible to quantify how much money the Air Force might save each year if 50 percent more new mothers breast-fed their children for six months. An article in the US Department of Agriculture publication *Food Review* reports:

Given that breast-feeding decreases the incidence and/or severity of specific illnesses in infants, it may significantly defray or reduce health care costs. An economic analysis of the health care savings of breast-feeding and formula feeding would be complex. Several of the illnesses that breast-feeding and formula feeding purportedly affect are chronic, with costs and savings that could accrue over several years and, in some cases, over a lifetime.<sup>13</sup>

Encouragement of breast-feeding, however, needs to extend beyond lip service or a briefing from a nurse about the value of breast-feeding. Supervisors need to make it clear that they support members who breast-feed their children. The easy availability of lactation rooms for expressing milk is important, and these are becoming more plentiful around the Air Force. More important, however, are clear signs of support from those in the chain of command. Too often, women are discouraged from expressing milk for later use by nasty looks or pointed comments about “wasted time” by supervisors.

Finally, the Air Force needs to revisit its policy on maternity leave. The breast-feeding habit is just becoming established at the six-week point (when Air Force women have to return to work). An additional four weeks of maternity leave, or part-time maternity leave, provide an opportunity for mother and baby to master breast-feeding and may make a mother more comfortable leaving her baby with a child care provider. Numerous comments

on the surveys indicated that six weeks is not sufficient maternity leave. One captain with a young son writes, “The military only allows six weeks [of maternity leave] and then a mother may try to take some additional leave, but it is not guaranteed. In the civilian world, it is *law* to allow three months of unpaid leave—and for good reason.”

Commanders, supervisors, and mothers-to-be need to be creative and plan ahead for maternity leave. The four weeks after the initial six weeks might involve the mother coming to work for a few hours each day or accomplishing work at home. Telecommuting is an option that allows for work and breastfeeding to coexist peacefully in the first few weeks after delivery. If the individual does not normally do work that lends itself to telecommuting, perhaps she could be trained on tasks that are compatible with telecommuting before going on maternity leave. Work and new motherhood are not mutually exclusive. I know: I delivered my second child 10 weeks after taking command of a squadron. I had prepared my operations officer to run the squadron, and I worked on evaluations, awards, and other documents from home. My orderly room staff made a run out to my house once or twice a week for signatures or to discuss issues. The squadron ran like clockwork. Other women who’ve had children have found different methods that worked equally well. Lt Col Carla Gammon, a navigator, said she “threw money at the problem.” She employed a nanny to care for her children while she worked a very demanding job on the Air Mobility Command staff. No single approach will work for all units or all new parents. The Air Force must encourage creativity and flexibility in this arena.

The revisions dealing with childbirth outlined above call for more than a new Air Force instruction or policy letter. They require an attitude change. That will not happen overnight. Senior leaders need to lead the way and demonstrate by their talk and actions that pregnancy is natural and desirable within the context of the Air Force family. Reducing the stress on Air Force mothers also reduces the stress on their husbands, who are frequently Air Force members as well. Commanders and pregnant members can plan for pregnancy and virtually negate the impact on mission accomplishment. The

Air Force can create more loyal members and more productive members by reshaping its policies related to childbirth and nursing. Policy changes and an education campaign will help, although effecting a true attitude change will take years.

### Notes

1. This paper contains numerous direct quotations from the survey and statistics calculated from the survey answers. These quotations and statistics are given in the text but most have no note citations. The original survey materials are retained in the author's personal collection.

2. Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC), "Personnel Statistics: Latest Air Force Demographics," n.p., on-line, Internet, 28 November 2001, available from <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil>.

3. MSgt Jerry Tapia, chief of Training Issues and Procedures in the Airmen Assignments Branch at AFPC, Randolph Air Force Base, Tex., telephone interview with author, 29 March 2002.

4. "AFPC Announces Home Basing Survey Results," Release N. 013, 25 January 2000, n.p., on-line, Internet, 26 March 2002, available from <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/pahistory/release/2000/02/homebasing>.

5. "Permanent Change of Station Cost per Move," n.p., on-line, Internet, August 2001, available from [http://www.saffm.hq.af.mil/FMC/65503/24-1.html\(3/26/02\)](http://www.saffm.hq.af.mil/FMC/65503/24-1.html(3/26/02)).

6. Carla Gammon and Margaret McCord, "Building Retention Today for a Better Air Force Tomorrow," unpublished Air War College (AWC) paper, January 2002, 6-7.

7. Toddi Gunter, "The Pause that Refreshes," *BusinessWeek*, 19 November 2001, 138, on-line, Internet, n.d., available from [http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/01\\_47/b3758112](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/01_47/b3758112). I am indebted to Gammon and McCord for pointing me to this source.

8. "Officer Initial Skills Training Costs," on-line, Internet, 28 March 2002, available from <http://www.saffm.hq.af.mil/FMC/65503>.

9. Perhaps serving with a Guard or Reserve unit for a year should be a requirement for senior leadership, along the same lines as the requirement to serve in a joint billet as the Goldwater-Nichols Act dictates.

10. Frankly, the overall effect of the comments on the surveys caused me to wonder just how equal a force the Reserves are. Four women spoke of having been passed over—twice—for promotion to major and then being promoted two grades or more in the Reserves. Leadership/officership standards must be the same for the Reserves to have the credibility they need. How can an individual not be suitable for promotion to major in the active force and still be deemed promotable in the Reserves? Other comments about training and job experience also gave the impression that standards are different in the Reserves. This may be an area for further investigation.

11. Interview question of Maj Gen Robert McIntosh asked in AWC Seminar 15; and General McIntosh, E-mail to author, 28 March 2002.
12. Jon P. Weimer, "Breastfeeding: Health and Economic Issues," *Food Review* 2, no. 2 (May–August 1999): 31.
13. *Ibid.*, 33.

## Conclusion

Sometime during the next 10 years, the Air Force will pin four stars on a woman. That will be a magnificent achievement for both the new general and the Air Force. With each such a milestone reached, the Air Force will find it easier to recruit and retain talented people and accomplish its mission effectively and efficiently. Talented individuals from across the demographic spectrum will look at the Air Force and see the opportunity to serve their nation to the best of their abilities. A few institutional changes can set the ball rolling.

Changing institutional attitudes is hard. Changing institutional culture is even harder. And yet, this paper calls on the Air Force to do both. It encourages a new way of looking at the value of diversity within the Air Force, which necessitates cultural changes in how we treat people. It is no longer enough—if it ever were—merely to allow people from certain demographic groups to wear Air Force blue and give them the same paycheck others of the same grade receive. The institution as a whole must embrace them and, yes, adapt its culture to fully capitalize on the talents of each and every Air Force professional. The ability to adapt is the key to survival and success.

This paper also calls on the Air Force to look beyond technology in its search for a revolution in military affairs. To adapt a popular bumper sticker: “Technology doesn’t win wars—people do.” Organizational structures and personnel practices offer equal opportunity for truly revolutionizing the way we fight and win wars. The changes to the relationship between the active and Reserve forces suggested here are the tip of the iceberg. Although they may go a long way toward mitigating some personnel losses (which is, after all, the primary focus of this paper), they are only the beginning. Further changes to the active-Reserve force mix and employment strategies have the potential to substantially expand the pool of talent available to the Air Force and revolutionize the way the United States imposes its political will. But that is a topic for another paper.

During the next 10 years, the United States will resolve the Global War on Terrorism, employing all the instruments of national power, including the military. The accomplishments

of that war will leave no doubt that talent, determination, and the will to take risks and innovate in pursuit of victory count in the twenty-first century Air Force. Implementing innovative retention practices involves little risk and may make future victories easier and less costly.

## Appendix A

### **Survey on Separation/Retention of Air Force Women**

USAF SCN 01-121

#### **Section One/Administrative**

1. How many years of AF service did you have at separation?  
<4            4-8            9-12            13-16            17-19

2. What year did you separate from the AF?

3. What was your rank when you separated from the AF?

Airman (E1-E4)    SSgt/Tech Sgt (E5-E6)    MSgt/SMSgt (E7-E8)

Lt (O1-O2)    Captain (O3)    Major (O4)    Lt Colonel (O5)

4. Did you stay in the AF Reserve?

Yes    No

5. What was your marital status when you left the AF?

Married    Divorced    Widowed    Single

6. How many kids did you have when you left the AF?

0    1    2    3    4 or more

7. How many kids do you have now?

0    1    2    3    4 or more

#### **Section Two/Reasons for Leaving the Air Force**

This section attempts to identify some factors contributing to your decision to leave the AF prior to reaching retirement eligibility. The following scale measures the criticality of the item to your decision-making process with 1 meaning the item didn't contribute at all to your decision to leave and 5 meaning the item was crucial to your decision. Please use the below scale to evaluate each of the factors.

**1** (Not a factor) **2** (Slight factor) **3** (Somewhat of a factor)  
**4** (Significant factor) **5** (Critical factor)

8. Wanted to start a family

9. Wanted to stay home with children

10. Wanted to spend more time with family (hours were too long/too many deployments or remote assignments)

11. Couldn't get adequate child care

12. Wanted to pursue civilian job opportunities to make more money

13. Wanted to pursue civilian job opportunities to do more fulfilling work

14. Wanted to pursue civilian job opportunities to move ahead quicker/further in the organization

15. Wanted to pursue civilian job opportunities where cultural climate was more accepting/embracing of women (recognized their contributions, sought to retain them, etc.)

16. Wanted more geographic stability (fewer moves)

17. Dissatisfied with quality of AF leadership

18. Other \_\_\_\_\_

### **Section Three/Retention Measures**

This section lists some program, policy, and cultural changes the Air Force could institute. Would any of them have effected your decision to leave the Air Force? In other words, had any of these programs been in place when you separated, might you have decided to stay in the AF until retirement? Please rank them using the below scale, with 1 meaning the item would not have effected your decision at all and 5 meaning you would almost certainly have stayed in the AF.

**1** (No impact) **2** (Slight impact) **3** (Some impact)

**4** (Significant impact) **5** (Probably would have stayed in the AF)

19. Home-basing (more geographic stability)

- 20. Availability of reliable, excellent child care
- 21. Flexible programs to support childbirth/nursing
- 22. Non-punitive break in service opportunity (you can leave the AF for 1-5 years to have children, care for an aging parent, write a book, etc., and return at your former rank)
- 23. Better opportunity for jobs, promotions
- 24. Higher pay
- 25. Availability of flexible job options (telecommuting one day a week, ability to move between active AF and Reserves, flex-time, etc.)
- 26. Transferable GI Bill education benefits (i.e., you could use your education benefits for your kids)
- 27. Other\_\_\_\_\_

Please provide any written comments, to include other programs the AF could institute to retain women, your satisfaction with your decision to leave the AF, and what you miss most about the AF since your separation.

**Section Four/USAF Career Decisions Survey Questions**

The Air Force surveys members who plan to separate to determine their reasons. For standardization purposes, if you have time, please rate the following factors to indicate how great a role they played in your decision to separate from the Air Force. Some of these items overlap slightly with the factors in Section Two, but none addresses exactly the same issues. Please use the 1-5 scale from Section Two:

**1** (Not a factor) **2** (Slight factor) **3** (Somewhat of a factor)  
**4** (Significant factor) **5** (Critical factor)

- 28. Amount of additional duties
- 29. Availability of comparable civilian jobs
- 30. Home station TEMPO (work schedule)
- 31. Choice of job assignment
- 32. Stay in base of assignment

33. TEMPO away (Number/duration of TDYs)
34. Retirement program that effects you
35. Leadership at MAJCOM/HQ USAF level
36. Availability of dependent medical care
37. Number of PCS moves
38. Unit resources
39. Leadership at wing or equivalent level
40. Number of personnel in my unit
41. Availability of medical care
42. Implementation of Expeditionary AF
43. Overall job satisfaction
44. Pay and allowances
45. Geographic area/current base
46. Recognition of your efforts
47. Compatibility with spouse's career/job
48. Leadership at unit level
49. Availability of dependent dental care
50. AF officer/enlisted evaluation systems
51. Readiness of your unit
52. Training/experience of unit personnel
53. Availability of dental care
54. Potential for outsourcing and privatization
55. Promotion opportunity
56. Availability of base housing
57. Bonuses/Special pay
58. Job security
59. Opportunity for education and training

- 60. Availability of base exchange
- 61. Equal employment opportunities in the AF
- 62. On-base child/youth programs
- 63. Availability of commissary services
- 64. On-base fitness recreation programs
- 65. Patriotism

May I contact you to conduct an interview about your decision to leave the active duty AF and your feelings about it now? If so, please provide your name and address/phone number or E-mail address.

## Appendix B

### Survey Cover Letter

FROM: Air War College (Lt Col Laura DiSilverio)

SUBJECT: Survey on Retaining Women in the Air Force  
(USAF SCN 01-121)

Hello!

My name is Laura DiSilverio, and I'm a student at the Air War College. I'm doing official research to determine why more women than men separate from the active duty Air Force before reaching retirement eligibility. Although the Air Force Personnel Center conducts separation research, it has not previously separated the responses by male/female. I think it's possible that women separate for different reasons than men do. As part of my research, I'm distributing the attached survey and asking you to please take the time to fill it out and return it to me. It should only take you 15-20 minutes to complete. All answers will be confidential, and my data will be presented strictly as group data.

My hypothesis is that women are important to the accomplishment of the Air Force mission and that the Air Force should look at new and innovative ways of retaining women longer. In addition to determining why more women leave the Air Force earlier, I'd also like to find out what kinds of programs or policy changes might induce them to stay. Please help! Please complete the attached survey and return it in the envelope provided. If it's easier for you to complete it via E-mail, so please send me your E-mail address, and I'll send you a copy: [laura.disilverio@maxwell.af.mil](mailto:laura.disilverio@maxwell.af.mil).

To be most useful, I need the survey returned by **15 Feb 02**. I'm using the data to prepare a report for Air Force leaders to consider in designing programs and policies to retain women. Thanks in advance for your help. I truly appreciate you taking time out of your hectic schedule to complete the

survey and help shape future Air Force initiatives related to women.

LAURA A. H. DISILVERIO  
Lieutenant Colonel, USAF

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