
Defense Report

AUSA



The Success of the All Volunteer Force —Wishing Won't Make It So.

The Rand Corporation, one of the nation's premier "think tanks" has recently issued a voluminous study which concludes that the All Volunteer concept of manning the active Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force has "worked." The press, almost without exception, covered the release of the report with euphoric comment. They reflected the general wish that the idea will be a success and that a return to a draft environment can be avoided.

Unfortunately most of the reportage was based on the news release accompanying the report rather than on detailed scrutiny of the 400-page report itself. Admittedly, it is asking a lot to expect a hard-pressed newsman to digest a thick report loaded with academic gobbledygook but one cannot escape the notion that they might have reached a somewhat less confident conclusion if they had done so.

If a judgment on the success or failure of the All Volunteer Force is limited to active elements alone, yes, the idea is a marginal success. Through hard work and the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars in advertising costs the active services are getting enough men and women of sufficiently high caliber to keep their ranks substantially filled. But what the Rand Report and the resulting news coverage failed to do was to look at the Total Force—the amalgamation of active and reserve forces that we have devised in the recent past to meet our far-flung security obligations without help from Selective Service. The report almost totally ignores or glosses over manpower problems in the reserves and our rapidly dwindling ability to mobilize in timely fashion.

To varying degrees all the reserve elements of the services have experienced a decline in enlistments in the absence of the draft. The situation is particularly bad in the Army Reserve, Army National Guard and Marine Corps Reserve. The pool of individual reservists, known as the IRR, is so depleted that by 1980 it will be more than 300,000 below mobilization requirements. Personnel in this pool are those whose six-year service obligation was partially fulfilled by draft or volunteer service. The draft machinery itself is so emasculated that it could not come close to fulfilling service requirements for draftees to reach training centers within 60 days of a mobilization order. It would be at least seven months before the first drafted replacements could reach forces in combat.

As much as we all may want the All Volunteer force to work we cannot ignore these realities. Only one segment of the concept is working. The rest of it—the part that must provide mobilization muscle—is not. Wishful thinking won't make it work. Only drastic action and greater manpower procurement costs can do that.