
Defense Report

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The Defense Manpower Commission— Two Years Lost in the Bureaucratic Shuffle

The Defense Manpower Commission was a group of distinguished civilians and military people jointly sponsored by the President and the Congress and charged with taking a comprehensive look at such things as the efficacy of the all-voluntary concept, the Nation's ability to mobilize in an emergency and at the whole spectrum of military compensation from enlistment incentives to a burial allowance.

The commission worked diligently for two years, finally submitting its report in April 1976. The report contained many valuable observations and constructive recommendations and yet it hit Congress and the Defense Department with all the impact of a half-toasted marshmallow. To be certain, some congressional staff members read the report—and maybe a few congressmen and senators did, too. But not one shred of the work of the commission was even considered for legislation.

It is understandable that a new Democratic president might not want to act on the recommendations of a commission supported by his Republican predecessor. But it is hard to understand why Congress, after appointing its share of commission members and appropriating money to run the commission could let its report slide by almost unnoted. President Carter's ultimate appointment of a Presidential Commission on Military Compensation provided an excuse for further delay.

But the most unfortunate part is yet to come. Knowing that they were running parallel to the work of the President's commission, the Defense Department deferred any comment on at least 37 of the manpower commission's recommendations, expecting that the new commission would deal with them. Unfortunately the newly released report of the compensation totally overlooks about twenty of the points the Defense Department had also avoided.

The men and women who labored for two long years to make a constructive contribution to the solution of myriad defense manpower problems must feel a strong sense of frustration while watching their work being buried by the passage of time and the accumulation of bureaucratic inertia. The taxpayers who funded the work of the commission with several million dollars of their money must share the feeling of impotence.

No one expected every recommendation of the commission to be embraced enthusiastically, translated into legislation and engraved into law but its work deserved far better treatment than it got.