
Defense Report

AUSA



What is the Right Number of Low Aptitude Service Members? Congressman Aspin Says He has the Answer

One of the many dilemma's facing military personnel planners is the question of the mix of aptitudes that will provide the most efficient force, be the most economical to train and present the fewest disciplinary problems. This situation was not brought on by the All Volunteer concept that now governs our armed forces but is as old as intelligence testing—the point in time at which it was possible to reliably predict a potential service member's abilities.

In the current testing scheme candidates for enlistment are categorized in five groups, with Category I including those with the highest aptitude and Category V for those with the least. The armed services are forbidden by law to recruit anyone in Category V and have been limited by Congressional dictum to no more than 18 percent of Category IV's in their total enlisted content. The Army says it can use the full 18 percent of "Cat IVs," the Navy says it can use 14.5 percent, the Marine Corps proposed to use 14.3 percent and the Air Force says it can use just 5 percent of this lowest acceptable aptitude group.

In actuality each of the services has been recruiting far less than those percentages because they have been able to get enough people in the higher categories. Yet in the face of frequent criticisms that the all-volunteer forces are "too dumb," Congressman Les Aspin of Wisconsin has suggested that the fault really lies with military personnel managers who assign high aptitude people to jobs too simple for them and thereby create attitude problems.

In rebuttal, the military personnel managers point out that the Category IV recruits require longer training time to absorb basic job skills and often arrive at their first regular duty station ill-prepared. With the strength of the forces cut to the bone, the military managers ask why they should not take the best people we can get so they can provide the highest possible efficiency from the limited numbers authorized. The situation is also complicated by glaring evidence that many of the high school graduates enlisted cannot even read at the expected level, thus forcing the Army to downgrade training literature to the 9th grade reading level.

Mr. Aspin's comments only accentuate the military dilemma, for if the services took more Category IV's the result would surely be added strain on the training system and a diminution of combat efficiency. To be sure, it might be easier to recruit "CAT IV's" but we must first answer the fundamental question—"How good do we want our armed forces to be?"