

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

**MAJOR GENERAL ERIK C. PETERSON
DIRECTOR OF ARMY AVIATION,
DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF G-3/5/7**

BEFORE THE

**HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL**

FIRST SESSION, 115TH CONGRESS

ON ARMY PILOT SHORTAGES AND STRATEGIES TO MITIGATE

MARCH 29, 2017

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

**STATEMENT BY
MAJOR GENERAL ERIK C. PETERSON
DIRECTOR OF ARMY AVIATION,
DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF G-3/5/7**

Chairman Coffman, Ranking Member Speier, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee on Military Personnel, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the state of Army Aviation pilot shortages and our Army's mitigation strategy.

The Total Army Force consisting of the Regular Army, the Army National Guard (ARNG), and the Army Reserve (USAR) employs over 4,000 total aircraft in its inventory, including both fixed- and rotary-wing (and an additional 8,000 unmanned systems). Those aircraft are expertly operated by approximately 14,000 rated aviators (and an additional 1,600 active component unmanned operators) across all three components. These Soldiers are operating in 39 countries around the world executing combat and theater security cooperation missions, while the remainder operate and train across all 54 States and Territories, building decisive action readiness and meeting domestic mission requirements.

Army Aviation provides an asymmetric advantage for our Nation as a combat multiplier. We remain focused on ensuring Combatant Commanders and our joint and coalition partners have the required reach, protection, lethality and situational understanding to win in an increasingly complex world, in exceptionally challenging conditions. The distinct advantage that Army Aviation provides is built on a foundation of highly trained and professional Army Aviation leaders and Soldiers.

For nearly 16 years, Army Aviation has been tested in the most demanding of operational environments at an unprecedented pace and duration, and our Soldiers and leaders have performed magnificently. Nevertheless, force structure adjustments and fiscal constraints caused the Army to make very difficult resourcing choices. We prioritized short-term readiness over the long-term recruiting and training required to achieve a strong, healthy force. We simply could not afford to train the number of pilots

we needed to sustain a fully manned, healthy force. More importantly, the current pilot strength across our force masks long-term pilot challenges that lie ahead.

Background

In response to a changing fiscal environment, and as a direct result of the implementation of the Budget Control Act of 2011, programmed training allocations were set below the minimum requirement. Due to these allocation shortfalls, there is a significant inventory gap in Regular Army Aviation Warrant Officers commissioned between 2010-2017. Additionally, more recent challenges with training throughput and civilian hiring competition for aviators further exacerbates the deficit. Although current pilot fill rates in our Regular Army Combat Aviation Brigades remain acceptable in all but the Apache fleet, the Army accessed 731 fewer Regular Army Warrant Officers over the past seven years than required to maintain a healthy force in the long term. We are currently achieving marginally acceptable manning by relying on senior Aviation Warrant Officers serving in junior positions. Simply put – in the short term, we are “top heavy” in compensating for our current accession and training deficit. Solutions we apply, however creative, will help but will not make up for several years of lost opportunity to recruit, access and train the right number of aviators. Although substantial shortages have not yet materialized in the Reserve Components; without deliberate action, shortfalls can be expected across the Total Army Force.

A recent development that compounds this problem is the active recruitment of Army helicopter pilots by the airline industry. From a historical perspective, the draw on military rotary-wing pilots by the major airlines has been relatively low. However, as the senior commercial airline pilots age and retire from the major airlines, the demand for replacement pilots has outpaced supply. As a result of this demand, major airlines have adjusted their entry requirements to facilitate an aggressive recruiting campaign for military rotary-wing pilots. Although this campaign is in its infancy, the new airline entry requirements allow a much larger portion of Army pilots to join, and when coupled with enticing monetary incentives, will undoubtedly challenge the Army’s ability to maintain a healthy and highly-skilled aviation force in all components.

Current Efforts and Way Forward

The Army is addressing the challenge of Aviation Warrant Officer shortages and will build long-term readiness through closely managed and simultaneous resourcing, equipping, and training strategies, while managing risk to aviation readiness across the Army. To accomplish this, we are focusing on three lines of effort: retention, training throughput, and accessions.

Retention of highly competent aviators is key to mitigating personnel shortages while the Army produces additional aviators to fill those shortages. Although retention across the Army is healthy, we have seen a steady increase in attrition of Aviation Warrant Officers over the last three years. Aviation Warrant Officer attrition rates have historically been around seven percent over the last decade but are now approaching nine percent. This trend is expected to continue unless we take swift action. Over 25% of these Aviation Warrant Officers are retirement eligible, with increasingly attractive opportunities in the civilian market. A growing shortage of mid-grade pilots available to replace the retirement eligible pilots further complicates the problem until a sufficient level of flight school graduates are able to mature within the pilot inventory to offset current shortages. These factors cause the Army to move pilots from one unit to another to meet deployment requirements, reducing dwell time and potentially intensifying the problem. To address retention issues the Army is formalizing graduated incentives that encourage pilots to continue their military aviation career as well as further rewarding pilots who advance their aviation qualifications. Attrition analysis indicates two key areas to target for retention incentives: pilots nearing the end of their six year Active Duty Service Obligation (ADSO) and retirement eligible Warrant Officers. Incentives under evaluation include Assignment Incentive Pay (AIP), Aviation Bonus (AvB) pay, and additional incentive pay for specialized qualifications (i.e. Instructor Pilot and Maintenance Test Pilot).

Additionally, the Army is increasing its capacity to train new pilots to ensure adequate inventories in the future. This commitment to fully resourcing our flight school is not a quick fix and must be phased in over several years. The Army plans to budget

at a higher level than in the past to be successful. The United States Army Aviation Center of Excellence (USAACE) at Fort Rucker, Alabama provides world-class aviation training. Maintaining high standards for training is critical to ensure the aviation force is ready to meet mission requirements and reduces risk. To achieve the appropriate number of trained pilots to support 23 Aviation Brigades (11 Active Component, 10 Army National Guard and 2 Army Reserve), the Army requires the training base to operate at near maximum capacity. Core requirements to meet this capacity include Initial Entry Rotary Wing (IERW) training as well as graduate level training to support production of instructor pilots and maintenance test pilots. The Army must carefully balance these core requirements with an increasing demand for training in support of Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and requests for training from sister services. While the Army must maintain our commitments with sister services and foreign partners, we have an obligation to place increased priority on mitigating our growing shortages first.

As the Army provides additional resources to its training base, we will also synchronize an incremental increase to Regular Army Warrant Officer accessions to deliberately grow our throughput to meet operational demand and correct for previous under accessions. Over the next three years, the Army will increase Regular Army Aviation Warrant Officer throughput by nearly 170 students. Maintaining the proper level of accessions of both Commissioned and Warrant Officers across all components is critical to the sustainment of 23 Aviation Brigades in the Total Army. Processes for analyzing and adjusting accession levels must also remain flexible to allow for future end state growth as operational requirements evolve.

Specifically, the Army is implementing nine strategies outlined below to overcome these shortfalls, and plans to budget at a higher level of resourcing than it has in the past, to fully implement. We already see positive change to throughput with consistent reductions to training backlog without jeopardizing the quality of pilots produced:

- Increase accessions from a planned 308 in Fiscal Year 2017 to 475 Regular Army Aviation Warrant Officers over the next 2-3 years.

- Offer graduated incentives and promotion opportunity that encourage pilots to continue their military aviation career as well as further rewarding pilots who advance their aviation qualifications.
- Actively recruit AH-64 and CH-47 qualified pilots who have recently left service. Leadership will assess aviators from this population for qualifications that would allow select personnel to augment training cadre at flight school.
- Look across the Total Army to leverage experience from aviators in our Reserve Components at the training base without negatively impacting Reserve Component units.
- Augment training base with higher instructor pilot fill rates through Call to Active Duty, Retiree Recall, and Active Duty Operational Support.
- Augment training base with aircraft (AH-64E and CH-47F), simulation devices, and instructor pilots.
- Adjust Program of Instruction (POI) to gain efficiencies where possible without reducing quality of training.
- Establish a Mobile Training Team to conduct AH-64D Aircraft Qualification Courses at unit Home Station (conversion of unit from OH-58D to AH-64D).
- Provide maintenance augmentation by operational units in support of training base as operational requirements allow.

Conclusion

As we focus on the future, the Army is taking steps to maximize Total Army Aviation Training capacity to meet current requirements while anticipating future growth. Though the Army currently possesses sufficient authorities to support increased accession and improved retention within assumed top-line budget projections, it is important that we are provided consistent budgetary support at our request levels to avoid shortfalls of the past. We can assure you that the Army's senior leaders are working to address current manning challenges, as well as the needs of the Army to provide capability anywhere, any time, against any threat.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of this Subcommittee, thank you for your steadfast support of the outstanding men and women in uniform, our Army Civilians, and their Families.