

Statement for

General Michael E. Ryan  
Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force

Before the

Senate Armed Services Committee

January 5, 1999

## **WRITTEN STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD**

### **SASC**

**5 January 1999**

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to update you on Air Force readiness since my testimony last September. As the Chief of Staff, I am proud of the dedicated men and women of our Air Force, as they serve to defend this great nation. They deserve our unwavering support.

On behalf of the men and women of the Air Force, I thank both the President, the Administration and Congress for focusing on improving military readiness. These efforts to address significant military readiness needs are important to our future national security. Since our last testimony to this committee and subsequent meetings with the President, we have seen strong support for improvements to pay and compensation for our outstanding airmen. Restoring the retirement system, closing the pay gap, and implementing pay table reform are three tangible efforts that our people deserve and appreciate.

### **AEROSPACE POWER**

As you know, the Air Force needs to maintain strong global readiness and warfighting capabilities to support the National Security Strategy. Indeed, aerospace power is pivotal to the success of our theater commanders both in peacetime and in war as recently demonstrated in Southwest Asia. Flying from bases throughout SWA and Turkey, USAF aircrews have performed superbly while putting their lives on the line in

Operation Desert Fox and enforcing the no-fly zones over Iraq. Their performance is typical of the rapid response and global power that the Air Force expertly provides to our combatant commanders and to our nation; not just in SWA, but around the globe in places like Bosnia, Kosovo, Korea, Latin America, Africa, etc.

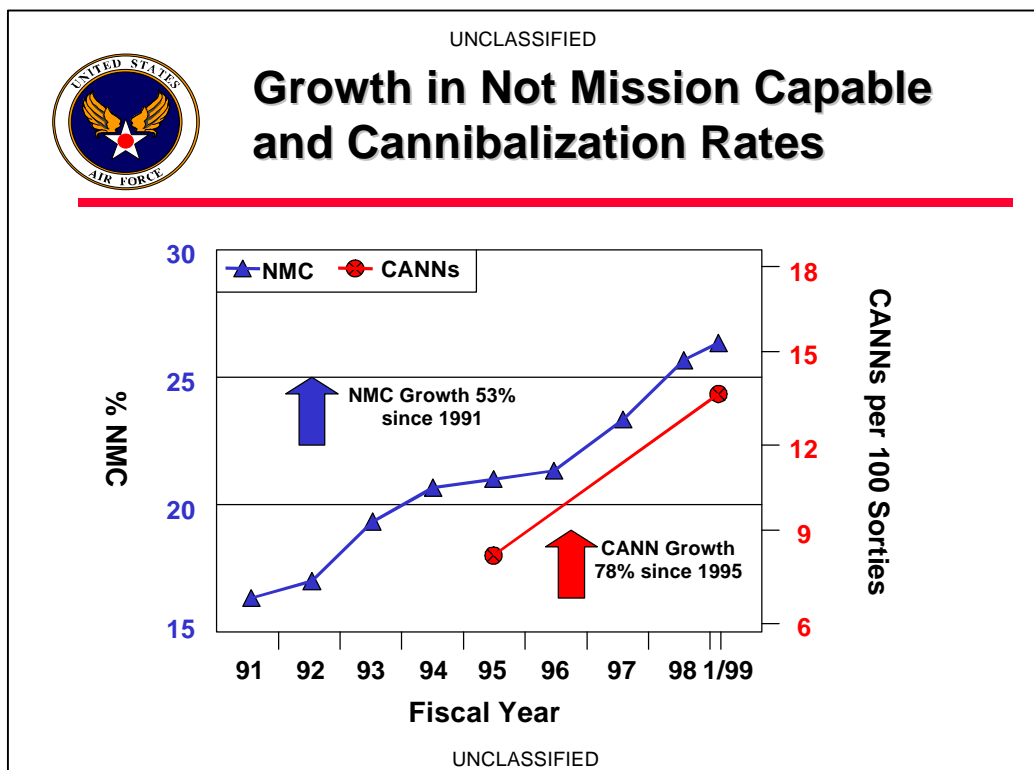
The nature of rapidly responsive aerospace power requires high levels of readiness. Our units are often required to be the first to respond and the last to leave. For these reasons, we announced a shift to an Expeditionary Aerospace Force concept last summer—to help ensure we can continue to meet our nation's defense needs for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, while providing greater predictability and stability for our people. As described in previous congressional testimonies in 1998, as well as two meetings with the President, we continue to closely watch our force readiness with concern. Several years of sustained high operations tempo and reduced funding in real terms have contributed to a slow, but steady decline in our readiness. More importantly, our projections indicate continued decline in key areas—unless we take action to reverse the trends now. It was particularly important for the President, the Secretary of Defense, and Congress to support supplemental funding for FY99 to help slow the decline in readiness. The additional funding provided was much needed. We will need your continued support for the FY2000 budget and beyond.

## **FORCES**

Virtually all Air Force aviation units—Active, Guard and Reserve—are tasked by joint operational plans to deploy and conduct combat operations during the earliest phases of contingencies. Therefore, we try to keep our forces at high readiness levels,

whether they are at home or deployed. The need for constant preparedness requires careful management of limited resources across the Air Force.

Our Air Force men and women, and their commanders have done great work in keeping control of readiness declines despite heavy tasking and tough fiscal constraints. Nonetheless, the mission capable rates for major Air Force weapon systems steadily declined nearly 10% since 1991 to a mission capability rate of 74% today. Indeed, nearly one-third of that decline has occurred in the last year. Furthermore, our parts cannibalization rate has grown by 78% during the last three years—it's jumped nearly 20% since I last testified.



Equipment capability rates are just one part of the readiness equation; people, training, and supplies make up the rest. Overall major unit readiness dropped another 1% since my September testimony. Because we place first priority on our forward stationed and deployed combat forces to keep them at a high state of readiness, our stateside-based forces have suffered most. For example, as the chart below shows, while overall major unit readiness declined by 15% in the last three years, stateside combat readiness has declined by 40% in that same time period. Although stateside readiness improved since my last testimony, it is still very low. These indicators point to significant readiness challenges now and in the future. In response to this, you will see substantial additional funding in our FY2000 budget and outyears when presented to Congress later this month.

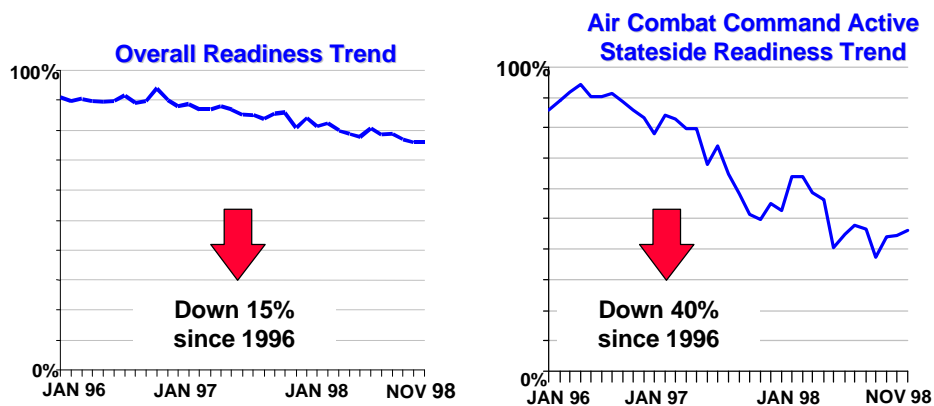


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## Force Readiness

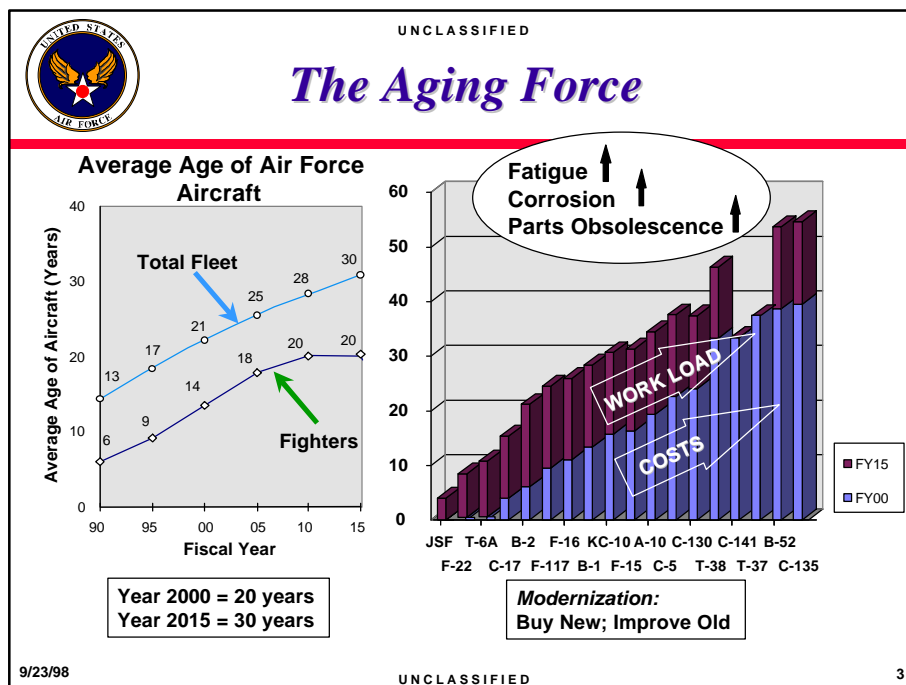
### Percent of Units in Top 2 Categories

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Finally, as the age of our aircraft increased, we incurred greater costs and workloads to maintain readiness. As we stated in earlier testimonies, next year the average age of our aircraft will be 20 years. Even including planned procurements, in 2015 the average age will grow to 30 years. Modernization is tomorrow's readiness. If we don't modernize by replacing aircraft that are beyond their useful life and revitalize those with life left in them, we can expect significant additional maintenance requirements, reduced reliability, and increased costs, as these aircraft grow older. The already high workload will increase for our people who must maintain and fly them.



## PEOPLE

People continue to be our most vital resource—they are the most critical component of readiness. The intense demands we place on them as they perform Air Force missions around the world require highly motivated, highly skilled, professional

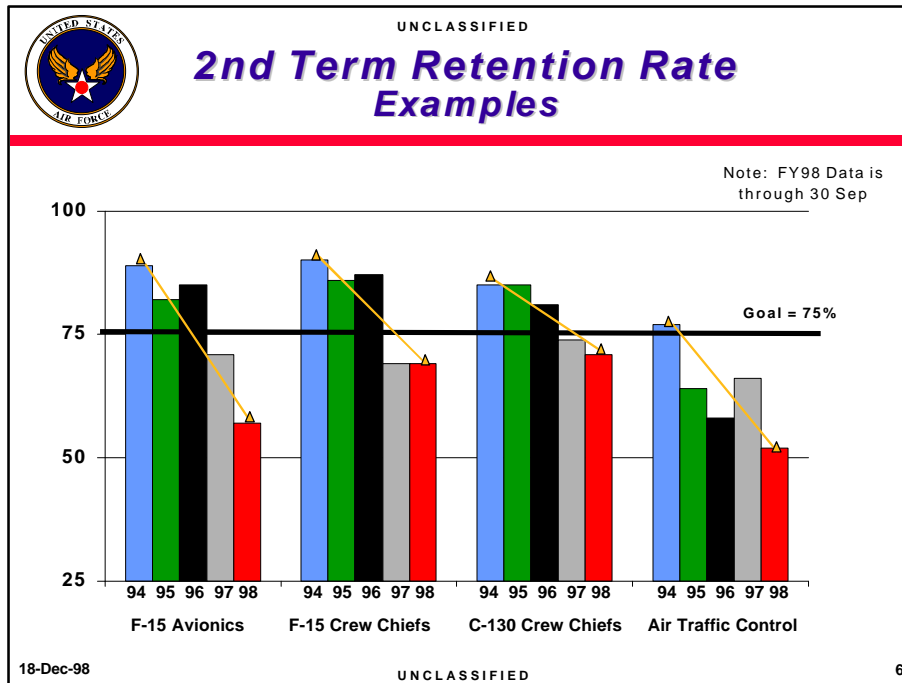
airmen. However, today we are performing more missions with fewer people. Indeed, today's active duty force is the smallest in the history of the Air Force. When the Air Force was formed in 1947, we had 386,000 active, uniformed people—today we have approximately 367,000—nearly 6% less than in 1947.

Even with this smaller force, recruiting and retention are a challenge. We are committed to recruiting and retaining high caliber people. In 1998, we achieved our recruiting goal of 31,300 recruits—99 percent were high school graduates. Despite this impressive statistic, we have seen a 9% decrease in those scoring in the top half of the Armed Forces Qualifying entrance test since 1991.

In 1999, because of retention downturns, we need to increase our recruiting goal by 8% to induct 33,800 recruits. Even with the help of enlistment bonuses, recruiters are working harder and harder to find the required number of quality recruits. The propensity to enlist is down 25% among males and 33% among females—a strong economy and alternative opportunities have decreased the pool of interested and qualified recruits. This has required a significant increase in advertising funds and recruiters.

Recruiting quality personnel, however, is only part of the challenge. The highly technical nature of our aerospace force today and in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, requires us to retain highly skilled individuals to ensure we can execute our missions. Overall retention remains a serious concern. 1998 was the first year since 1981 that we were unable to meet our reenlistment goals for all three reenlistment categories: first-term, second-term, and career. We especially must retain sufficient numbers of experienced

non-commissioned officers. These mid-career, highly technically qualified airmen represent an experience and leadership base critical to force readiness.

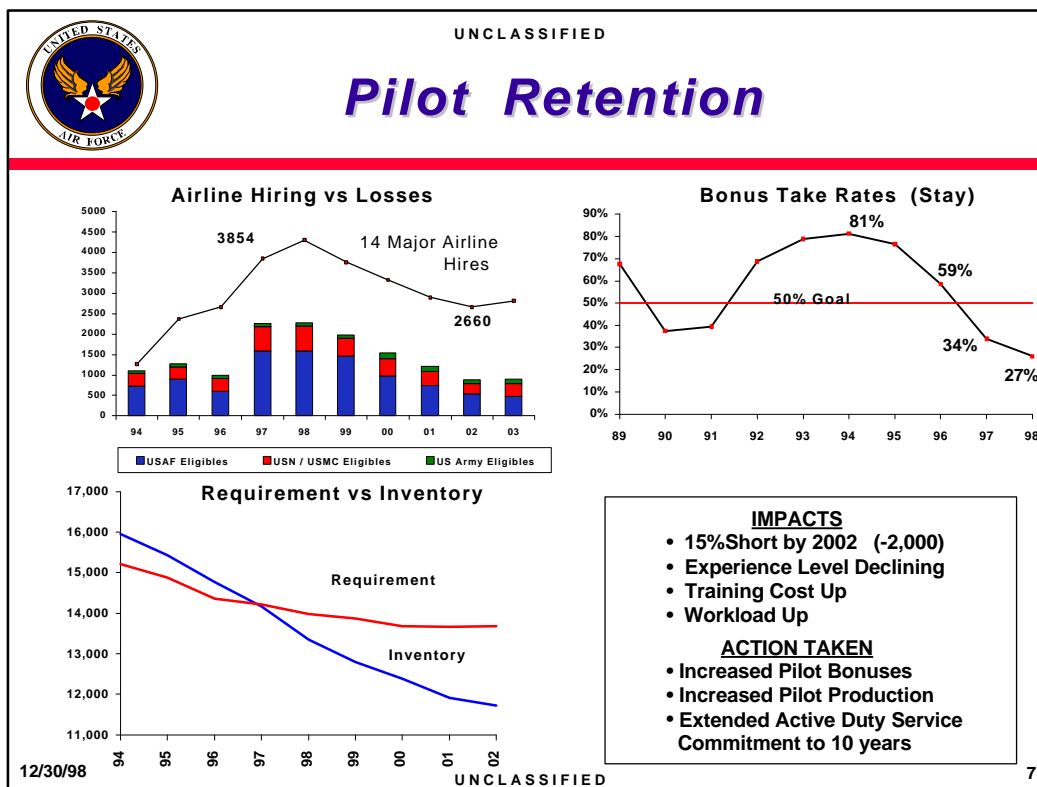


Our reenlistment rate for those entering their second reenlistment contract (those with eight to ten years of service) is currently well below our goal and declining. Importantly, many key career fields such as avionics specialists, aircraft crew chiefs, and air traffic controllers are experiencing even larger drops in reenlistment. We're highly concerned about the trend because in the next three years 90% of the enlisted force will face a reenlistment decision. In an effort to improve second-term reenlistment rates, we've expanded the number of career fields eligible for reenlistment bonuses—57% of all specialties now receive a reenlistment bonus. Since my last testimony, we've added 10 new specialties to the list.

For the Air Force to continue attracting and retaining quality people, we must be competitive with contemporary labor markets. Restoring the retirement system as a



retention incentive is our top priority. At the same time, we need to keep pace with inflation and keep military pay competitive with private sector wages. Pay and retirement are not the only areas of concern. Because the majority of the people we want to retain have families, quality health care, safe, affordable, and adequate housing, valued community programs, and expanded educational opportunities are very important. Air Force members and their families endure frequent separations resulting from our increased operations tempo. Our members who leave the Air Force often tell us that we are losing them because they are torn between the job they enjoy and the needs of their families. Therefore, while we recruit individuals—we must retain families.



Retaining our highly skilled and experienced pilots continues to be a great concern. Our primary retention indicator for pilots is the number accepting the bonus to

stay in the Air Force five more years beyond their initial eight year commitment after pilot training. That rate has dropped to 27% last year--well below the Air Force goal of 50%.

Major airline hiring is projected to remain well above 2,000 pilots a year through 2004, and all the Services combined cannot satisfy their demand. For our pilots, the airlines offer better pay and more stability for their families. Today, we are over 700 pilots short of our requirement and that number is steadily growing. If pilot retention remains as it is today, we will be short 2000 pilots by 2002. That will be 15% fewer than needed for Air Force requirements.

In an effort to minimize our pilot shortfall and with the help of Congress, we have increased aviation continuation and incentive pays. While we believe these programs have helped slow the decline, they have not turned around pilot retention. For our pilots with more than 14 years of service, only 7% separated from the Air Force in 1995. In 1998, 25% separated with more than 14 years of service.

We have also reduced operations tempo and implemented increases in pilot production. But for every two pilots that we train, three are choosing to separate. To bolster pilot-manning levels in the future, we have increased our initial pilot training commitment from 8 to 10 years. However, this change will not provide any relief until well into the next decade. In the interim, we face one of the most serious pilot force challenges in Air Force history. The President's announcement on Saturday to bolster pay and retirement benefits for our forces will be reflected in our budget and will be a very positive force in recruitment and retention.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

Because quality people are so important to readiness, we must also ensure they have a quality working and living environment. Due to funding shortfalls, we have significantly under invested in our base operating support, real property maintenance, family housing, and military construction. We have a \$4.4 billion real property maintenance backlog—and it's growing. Our houses average 35 years of age. We can only afford to renovate a small percentage of these houses each year out of the 110,000 houses we maintain. We cannot continue to mortgage the infrastructure area of our force readiness—where our force works and lives—without significant long-term effects.

## **SUMMARY**

The men and women of your Air Force are dedicated and selfless professionals. Nearly 95,000 of them are forward stationed and deployed throughout the world defending our country. They deserve the best equipment and training, quality medical care, adequate housing for their families, equitable pay, and a reasonable retirement for their service. We are truly concerned about the downturn in readiness outlined in this statement. Force readiness remains very fragile. We must reverse these trends through substantial and sustained funding for the needs of our force. If not, the concern reiterated today could turn rapidly into a readiness crisis tomorrow. The Administration has recognized this possibility and has been very supportive in constructing the FY2000 budget and outyear defense spending plan to forcefully counter it. The President said this Saturday: "This is the start of a six year effort that will represent the first long term,

sustained increase in defense spending in a decade.” We will need the commitment of Congress to achieve that goal.

Thank you for inviting me here today to speak on behalf of our dedicated Air Force men and women throughout the world.