

REDUCING THE THREAT OF DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR BY MILITARY PERSONNEL

by

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September 2003

for the
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Military Personnel Policy

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A wide-range of destructive acts are committed by military personnel: sabotage, serial murder, rape, and many other serious criminal acts. There have also been incidents with more serious implications for national security involving nuclear weapons and reactor personnel. These, however, have not been of a nature where significant damage has occurred.

A number of research studies have been conducted to isolate factors associated with destructive behavior by military personnel. Two areas of concern have been identified: (1) lack of effective prescreening procedures to identify military entrants with criminal records and other behavioral adjustment problems, and (2) inadequate management practices that have allowed the retention on active duty of military personnel who have shown a pattern of substandard behavior. As a result, a number of individuals are in positions where destructive acts could have the most serious consequences.

Study reports and magazine articles are provided in tabs that document the difficulties faced by Defense in reducing destructive acts by military personnel:

At Tab 1 is a report of a study involving enlisted men from California showing about one-third enlisting with a preservice arrest record. Many were not identified through Service screening procedures, and one-in-three received a moral waiver. The unsuitability attrition rate for the preservice offender group was 36 percent, over 70 percent higher than that of California recruits with no known arrest history.

At Tab 2 is an article "The Wrong Stuff" from the Washingtonian (October 1997) in which Tom Philpott describes why so many applicants with an arrest history have been able to enlist. Reasons vary from incomplete criminal record searches to questionable moral waiver determinations. Anecdotal information was also given to show the kinds of problems some preservice offenders present after entering military service.

At Tab 3 is a report of a study involving the Adaptability Screening Profile (ASP), a behavioral questionnaire developed for OSD (AP) to serve as an enlistment-screening device. Scores on the measure show useful validity in predicting first-term unsuitability attrition overall, as well as for individuals with a preservice criminal history record.

At Tab 4 is a report of a study involving inservice criminal behavior among Army career enlisted personnel still on active duty. More than one in four was found to have an inservice criminal record with a

“probable cause” determination. Many had multiple records. Severe disconnects were found between Army personnel and criminal record systems, with military commanders apparently unaware of prior criminal acts when meting out punishment for later offenses.

At Tab 5 is an article by Ken Silverstein appearing in Mother Jones (November 1998) that focuses on military personnel assigned to nuclear weapons duties. The publication describes the failure of military commanders to identify prominent signs of emotional instability in “cleared” personnel, and the violent destructive acts that can follow.

At Tab 6 is a report of a study involving Navy nuclear reactor personnel. The anecdotal information provided identifies problems both in initial selection and retention on-the-job after showing signs of behavioral instability.

At Tab 7 is a report of a study examining the behavioral reliability of Navy enlistees assigned to highly sensitive duties. In a number of occupations reviewed, over 10 percent of those on active duty were identified as having a drug/alcohol abuse problem or hospitalization for psychiatric reasons.

Findings from the studies and articles cited above show widespread problems in initial selection and continuing evaluation procedures for military personnel, including those assigned to high-risk positions. Regarding initial selection, there have been recent gains in obtaining access to state and local criminal records for screening purposes, although use of the information by the Services has been uneven. Critically important, development of applicant screening procedures to identify individuals with behavior disorders has lagged, contributing to suitability problems and destructive acts occurring later during active duty.

The Services have generally not been receptive to improving their suitability screening procedures, largely since their use would reduce applicant supply to some extent. This has been true even during periods when selection ratios have been favorable for their use. Recruiting commands have shown little interest in performing school and employment checks, or in using self-report behavioral adjustment measures for initial selection purposes. Medical history questionnaires currently used for enlistment screening add little to mental health evaluation since the forms are not well-designed and give inadequate coverage to symptoms of behavioral disorder.

Behavioral monitoring of active duty personnel has also been problematic. Suitability-related information in many automated record files

maintained by the Services is not necessarily available to supervisory personnel. Records concerning psychiatric hospitalization, criminal offenses, and spouse/drug/alcohol abuse that are needed to establish a pattern of unsuitable behavior may not be referenced in personnel files available to commanders. Linkages among these databases, crucial for effective personnel and medical decisions, are not being made.

Use of behavioral assessment and medical information for selection and monitoring purposes is required under the Defense Personnel Reliability Program (PRP) for nuclear weapons assignments. Designed to help guard against destructive acts involving nuclear weapons, this special program also has its deficiencies. Some individuals are improperly screened initially for nuclear weapons-related positions, and there are commanders who have not learned how to recognize and react to signs of behavioral disorder.

Although the PRP has execution deficiencies, it is still the best model for reducing the likelihood of destructive acts among those assigned to high-risk duties, and has led to similar programs for biological and chemical weapons. Personnel assigned to nuclear reactor duties, where major destructive acts are possible, are not now subject to the same level of scrutiny.

An immediate problem faced by Defense is that there are military personnel with preservice and inservice records that clearly establish a pattern of substandard behavior, and whose commanders are not aware of this information. These individuals constitute a high-risk group for destructive behavior and need to be identified. Linkages are required among automated data files available within and outside Defense to provide this information to military managers for review and appropriate action.

Based on the available evidence, a number of remedial actions are required to reduce the likelihood of serious destructive acts by military personnel, with special emphasis given those in high-risk positions:

- Developing improved behavioral screening measures for military selection and job classification purposes.
- Applying available automated data files to identify active duty personnel with a recorded history of serious preservice and inservice behavior problems.
- Providing military managers with guidelines on the behavioral signs and patterns likely to be associated with destructive acts.