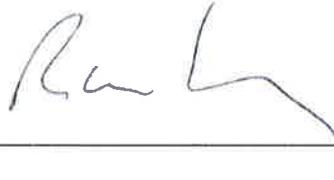


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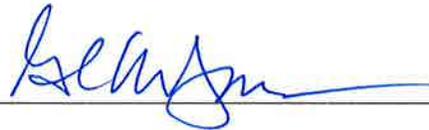
Rob Koonce, Ed.D., Chair



Tony Williams, Ph.D., Committee Member



Jennifer Moss Breen, Ph.D., Director



Gail M. Jensen, Ph.D., Dean

BLEEDING TALENT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PILOT RETENTION IN THE  
B-2 COMMUNITY

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By  
STEPHEN J. BRESSETT

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A DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of Creighton University in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in  
Interdisciplinary Leadership

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Omaha, NE  
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## Abstract

Across the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), retention rates continue to decrease. A number of external factors are at play including the growing civilian economy and continuous combat engagements in the post-9/11 era. Additionally, internal factors are eroding away at each military service's ability to adequately retain the necessary skilled personnel to fight tomorrow's wars. The U.S. Air Force (USAF) has experienced this issue the hardest with massive pilot shortages. In addition to the pending manning crisis, the service finds itself center stage in enduring world conflict and amidst complex social problems. Effective leadership has never been more critical for a service looking for standout leaders amongst a retention deficit. This paper examines the factors most influencing pilot retention in the B-2 community.

*Keywords:* United States Air Force, pilot retention, B-2, leadership

## Dedication

For Amy and my boys – the wolf pack – I love you. Thank you for letting me pursue this lifelong dream. You have sacrificed alongside of me patiently and I cannot be any more grateful. I am so proud to be your husband and your father - it is the privilege of my life.

## Acknowledgements

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Thank you to my family and friends who have traveled this road with me over many years. My Mom and Dad, Drs. Karen and John Bressett for making academic curiosity a household requirement. Patrick Bennett, Lee Ebersole, Sabrina Ezzell, and Meghan Dimsa your guidance, laughter and friendship helped get me to the finish line despite many difficult periods, we persisted – together. I will be forever in your debt for all the phone calls, texts, laughs and proof reading sessions.

And a final thank you to the Air Force pilots who have sworn an oath to defend our great nation. I hope this work is an accurate reflection of your voice– and I know either way you will continue to resolutely shoulder the burden that the country places on you and your families every day.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### **Introduction and Background**

Rated airmen are flooding out of the United States Air Force (USAF) (www.af.mil) at an unsustainable, and alarming rate (Winsor, 2017). It has not gone unnoticed by those who choose to stay in the service and are forced to burden greater responsibilities with fewer resources (Saunders, 2015). The crippling shortage has taken its toll on the service's capacity to provide national security and achieve national objectives, presenting a significant and complex real-world problem with dire security implications. At its best, it has cost the service combat readiness, and at its worst has the potential to cause complete mission failure. Specifically, USAF pilots have elected to leave in droves. Speculation on the mass exodus has leadership scapegoating the current boom in commercial airline hiring as the crucial catalyst (Philpott, 2017). Other services have also taken notice of the USAF's attempts at vectoring the conversation outward, and instead insist that the culprit is a lack of cultural homeostasis, contending that the Air Force does not have a pilot retention problem; "they have a leadership problem" (McCain, 2017, p. 3).

The USAF serves as the aerial warfare service branch of the U.S. Armed Services and is one of seven American uniformed services. The service was originally a branch of the U.S. Army, but gained distinction as a separate service in 1947 under the National Security Act (www.af.mil). The USAF's official mission is nuclear deterrence operations, special operations, air superiority, global integrated information, surveillance and reconnaissance, space superiority, command and control, cyberspace superiority, personnel recovery, global precision attack, building partnerships, rapid global mobility

and agile combat support ([www.af.mil](http://www.af.mil)). There are over 307,000 members currently serving in the active duty Air Force ([www.af.mil](http://www.af.mil)). The 509<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing (BW) is a conventional and nuclear capable bomber wing that falls under the authority of Air Force Global Strike Command. The Wing is home to the USAF's only inventory of B-2 stealth bombers, and approximately 3,500 Airman ([www.whiteman.af.mil](http://www.whiteman.af.mil)). The 509<sup>th</sup> BW is headquartered at Whiteman Air Force Base (WAFB), Missouri.

America is familiar with the complex problems of the modern world. An unforgiving increase in the speed of technology has directly called for the equal increase in the speed of innovation; something on which the USAF prides itself (Warwick, 2017). Existential threats that are becoming more lethal and persistent require our attention. China (Daniels, 2017), Russia (Rinehart, 2017), Iran (Olson, 2014), and North Korea (Kharpal, 2018) have dedicated vast resources to steal American technology and have been successful.

This increased threat from foreign actors directly correlates to the increased necessity for a strong, organized, well equipped, and highly trained military force (Rinehart, 2017). According to Warwick (2017), the implications of a pilotless air service would render it incomplete and would inevitably mean global defeat. The retention issue also impacts national security. At the current decline, the USAF would not have enough fighter pilots in the next 10 years to man squadrons at home or abroad, crumbling the readiness of the United States' first line of defense (Rinehart, 2017). Air Force Chief of Staff, General David Goldfein accentuated the issue by saying, "We are in a crisis. We're 1,500 pilots short, and if we don't find a way to turn this around, our

ability to defend the nation is compromised” (Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs, 2017).

### **Statement of the Problem**

With tremendous attention and resources dedicated to the fighter pilot staffing collapse, little is being said about the manning status of the other USAF platforms (Burns, 2017). The USAF is rightfully undergoing organizational triage, attempting to attack the most looming crisis first. However, despite concentration on the fleeing fighter pilots, there are other retention issues forthcoming. Notably, the bomber pilot community is undergoing its own form of retention recoil. Specifically, a steadfast decline in the Aviator Retention Pay (ARP) take rates over the last four years have largely gone unnoticed, indicating a pending exodus. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2014, FY15, FY16 and FY17, take rates for bomber pilots dropped from 67%, 57%, 50%, and 46%, respectively (Beard, 2018). Across the entire bomber force, including active duty, Air National Guard, and Air Force Reserve, the community is manned at 76.6% and the fighter community is manned higher at higher 79.6% (Beard, 2018). This precipitous decline represents a complex, real world problem that needs to be addressed. No research currently exists specifically examining retention in the B-2 community. The current study was not intended to be an indictment of former, current, or future leadership; but rather to serve as an evidence-based source of true and current data regarding the viewpoints of current B-2 pilots and their retention intentions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study was to explore the contributing factors of the pilot retention crisis in the B-2 community of the U.S. Armed Forces.

### **Research Question**

The following research question will guide the current study:

Why are B-2 pilots in the USAF opting to leave the service at the expiration of their Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training (SUPT) Active Duty Service Commitment (ADSC)?

### **Aim of the Study**

The aim of this dissertation research was to create an evidenced-based theory that informed current USAF leadership of the contributing factors that most greatly impact retention in the B-2 community. The research results aspire to help shape future policy and alter the current pilot-manning crisis by informing leaders of the factors most directly impacting B-2 pilot retention.

### **Methodology Overview**

Grounded theory was chosen as the methodology for the current study as it provides for an in-depth exploration of the process and leads to a deep understanding of the pilot retention problem. The theory developed through this study may be used by future military leaders seeking to transform their organization and retain military pilots.

Data collection for this study was gathered during multiple interviews using a protocol based on Creswell's (2014) qualitative research techniques. The interviews were semi-structured and consisted of qualitative open-ended questions. The researcher

structured each question in an effort to narrowly focus on member's intentions to stay or leave the USAF after their initial under graduate pilot training (UPT) active duty service commitment (ADSC) expired and identify the key catalysts for their decision.

The interviews were conducted over the course of two weeks in the Spring of 2018, at a location to be determined by the interviewee, or over the phone. The location of the interview was specifically designated by the researcher to eliminate potential benefits or flaws regarding where the interview took place, and how the interviewee responded (Babbie, 2017; Leech, 2002). Additional interviews were conducted over the phone with other B-2 pilots who were no longer stationed at WAFB but could offer insights into why they elected to leave or stay in the community.

All of the interviews were audio recorded using a TOOBOM V01 ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)) digital voice recorder paired with a Lavalier clip-on microphone for enhanced clarity and accuracy. Additionally, an iPhone 5 ([www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com)) was used as a backup recording device to guarantee a captured recording. Prior to initiating the interview protocol, the researcher briefly explained the interview scenario, the rationale for the interview, the anticipated duration, and the role of the researcher during the interview. Participant anonymity was granted given the personal nature of the subject matter, and the perceived potential for reprisal. Upon completion of the interviews, the audio recordings were saved and labeled on the researcher's computer for subsequent transfer and analysis. Transcripts of the interviews were created using the company Rev ([www.rev.com](http://www.rev.com)), which produced a verbatim Microsoft Word document of the interview.

Data analysis is the most difficult and most crucial aspect of qualitative research (Dey, 1993). The researcher completed analysis and data coding by hand. Basit (2003)

concludes that coding by hand allows the researcher to communicate and connect with the data to facilitate the comprehension of the emerging phenomena and to generate theory grounded in the data (Basit, 2003). The analysis of qualitative data is a critical step to extracting themes and sub-themes (Miles, 1979). The analysis can be a difficult task because it is not fundamentally a mechanical or technical exercise. It is a dynamic, intuitive and creative process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorizing. Most qualitative researchers analyze their own data to gain a deeper understanding of what they studied and to continually refine their interpretations (Bailey & Bailey, 2017; Basit, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **Definition of Relevant Terms**

The following terms were used operationally within this study.

***509<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing***: The subordinate Wing of Air Force Global Strike Command and Eighth Air Force responsible for B-2 operations, training, and equipping.

***509<sup>th</sup> Operations Group***: The subordinate group to the 509<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing that is responsible for executing B-2 operations, training, and support.

***11X***: The Air Force Specialty Code used to designate pilots and the specific aircraft (11F = fighter pilot, 11B = bomber pilot, etc.)

***Active Duty Service Commitment***: A contract between the U.S. Air Force and an individual committing them to a specific length of service.

***Aviators Pay***: A monthly special pay allotted to pilots due to the inherent dangers and hardships of their duties.

***Aviation Retention Pay:*** A financial bonus guaranteed to an individual who agrees to remain on operational flying duty for at least one year after their initial terms of service expires.

***B-2 Stealth Bomber:*** A military aircraft using advanced technology to render it virtually undetectable to sight, radar, or infrared sensors.

***Billet:*** A particular job assignment within the U.S. Air Force.

***Bomber:*** An aircraft designed to carry and drop bombs.

***Fiscal Year:*** A year as reckoned for taxing and accounting purposes.

***Grounded Theory:*** Grounded theory studies move beyond a description and lead to a discovery or a formation of a theory for a process or an action.

***Headquarters Air Force (HAF):*** The highest level of command in the United States Air Force organizational structure.

***Major Command (MAJCOM):*** The second highest level of command in the United States Air Force organizational structure.

***Operations tempo (ops tempo):*** A measure of the pace of an operation or operations in terms of equipment usage.

***Pilot:*** A person who operates the flying controls of an aircraft.

***Rated officer:*** An officer of the U.S. Armed Forces who is filling a job that has flying related duties (pilots, navigators, air battle managers, and remotely piloted aircraft operators).

## **Limitations, Delimitations, and Personal Biases**

### **Limitations**

Limitations are external conditions that restrict or constrain the research scope and may affect the outcome (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Since participants were only from WAFB and the B-2 pilot community, results of this study may not be transferable to other bases, or other military aircraft communities. There is ongoing formal research dedicated to the retention crisis across the USAF; this study narrowly focuses on the B-2 community. Additional retention concerns merit further research and should be reserved for future research. Participants were interviewed in the workplace with limitations on controlling the meeting room and time. Lastly, due to the specific nature of the research question, the sample size is limited to a small cohort. This population group represents the 2006 and 2007 fiscal year group within the B-2 community.

A limitation of any study is a systematic bias, which the researcher cannot control (Marriam & Tisdell, 2016). Limitations could affect study results. One limitation of this study would include keeping information at the unclassified level. The researcher coordinated with security managers in an effort to ensure no classified information is contained in the dissertation. Further, the researcher solicited Creighton students and faculty for peer review. Specifically, the researcher solicited and received feedback on the amount of military jargon in the study. Additionally, the desire for conducting face-to-face interviews did allow for personal interaction and achieved data saturation while using an unknown number of research participants (Creswell, 2014).

**Delimitations**

The researcher systematically introduced delimitations to the study. One example of delimitation included this study involving only B-2 pilots stationed at WAFB at the time the research was conducted. While the pilots currently flying the B-2 have all flown other airframes, and come from a variety of backgrounds, they are all stationed at the same location. Due to the physical location restriction of WAFB, and that the B-2 is only based out of this base in Missouri, they were a restricted pool of participants. Prior to the session, the interviews were conducted voluntarily, and the opinions conveyed were not representative of the USAF's official standpoint on the subject. These pilots represented the culmination of B-2 aviators as interview participants (Babbie, 2014).

**Personal Biases**

The researcher has previous experience as a B-2 pilot stationed at WAFB, where he developed some of his own perceptions about pilot retention. Further, due to the relatively small population size, the researcher has previously established professional and personal relationships with the participants. Despite inherent bias, the interviewees would be instructed to answer honestly, without fear of reprisal, and identify critical retention issues. In an effort to control this bias, the researcher ensured the questions asked to participants were free from suggestive bias (Prince & Murnan, 2004). Utilizing previous professional relationships, the researcher would be able to obtain an information rich sampling of qualitative research. The researcher was mindful of how the focus of this study is directed to the greater good of military readiness, and not solely highlight cultural, financial, or professional flaws of the system. An audit trail includes field notes, coding documents, audio recordings, written transcripts, and dissertation committee

members who have conducted an audit check of the dissertation in practice. Due to the potential for bias, the researcher employed bracketing as a way of consciously being aware of preconceived ideas (Creswell, 2014).

### **Leader's Role and Responsibility in Relation to the Problem**

The researcher previously spent five years as a combat mission ready B-2 pilot. Air Force Doctrine Document 1-1 (2004), Leadership and Force Development defines leadership as the art and science of motivating, influencing, and directing people to accomplish an assigned mission (Lambert, 2002). Leadership is interdisciplinary in nature, and has four normative reference points to ethical leadership, (a) humane orientation, (b) justice orientation, (c) responsibility and sustainability orientation, and (d) modern orientation (Eisenbeiss, 2012). Eisenbeiss sets out to identify current issues with conceptual vagueness associated with ethical leadership and develop an interdisciplinary integrative approach for ethical leadership. Ultimately, a grounded theory for ethical leadership is supported by the research of this study.

At Air University ([www.au.af.mil](http://www.au.af.mil)), the USAF's academic center of excellence, the Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM) is a core-learning outcome. The FRLM is a conglomerate of ideas generated to sculpt transformational leaders through action (Kirkbride, 2006). More specifically, the USAF seeks to create leaders who embody the idealized influence characteristic of transformational leadership (Stone, Wiggins, Turner-Holland, & Looper, 1998). Transformational leaders embody the true spirit of leadership, as they tend to be influential through their actions. They put followers' needs above their own, and their behavior is consistent with the values and principles of the group, reaffirming shared commitment to the organization's mission (Johnson, 2015).

Determining the USAF's commitment to ethics would be an extension of idealized influence, or *walk-the-walk* leadership. The behaviors exhibited by leaders would be a logical flow from educating members of the organization to the enforcement of the ethical standards established by the service's core values (Toner, 2006)

Transformational leadership has been added to the curriculum of the U.S. Air Force Academy, and the USAF has examined officers who are transformational leaders because they serve as role models for the cadets (Bass, 1990). Transactional leaders demonstrate two key leadership styles, management by exception, and contingent reward (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Whereas these methods can both be effective, the USAF has determined that transformational leadership is the preferred style (Stone et al., 1998). When a leader models a walk-the-walk approach to transformational leadership, they are directly demonstrating behaviors that lead to organizational success (Bass, 1990).

### **Authenticity**

A 2016 survey by the Society of Human Resource Management shows that employee recognition and engagement is key to retaining good employees ("Society", 2016). Although 51% of supervisors say they recognize employees who do a good job, only 17% of the employees at the same organizations report that their supervisors do well at recognizing them ("Society", 2016). An astounding 64% of Americans who leave their jobs say they do so because they do not feel appreciated (Robbins, 2000). The USAF is no different, and exit surveys are communicating the same sentiments. In fact, of the top five reasons why Airman left the service in 2015, four of them were directly related to a lack of appreciation ("Military Pilot Shortage," 2017).

Traditional approaches to employee recognition may need to be reevaluated. Continuing these activities may actually increase negativity within the work environment (White, 2014a). Learning what each individual employee values and then communicating appreciation to them in a way that is perceived as authentic is critical to having a positive result (White, 2014a). This approach defines the leadership philosophy of *authentic appreciation*, wherein appreciation is tailored towards the individual's physiological, social, and behavioral needs. White (2014b) contends that four conditions need to be present in order for a team member to feel appreciated: (a) appreciation is communicated regularly, (b) through language and action important to the recipient, (c) personal and individualized, and (d) feels authentic. Authenticity engages directly with subordinates, and by definition focuses the leader on the needs of those they are serving (Chapman & White, 2011).

### **Significance of the Study**

The retention of qualified military personnel is essential to preserving morale and unit readiness and to avoiding the costs associated with training replacement personnel in essential skills. The military services spend millions of tax dollars on basic and specialized flight training per pilot. It can take as much as two years before student pilots are awarded their *wings* and become a *rated* officer. This training is only the foundation for the sophisticated skill set that will be required to fly some of the most advanced aircraft in the world. The training requires a large commitment from both the pilot and the service, with pilots having one of the longest service obligations of any specialty in the military (Powers, 2006). Currently, the USAF requires pilots to serve a minimum military obligation of 10 years after receiving their wings; the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine

Corps (USMC) both require only eight years for fixed-wing pilots (Powers, 2006). The Army also has fixed-wing pilots, but they are a relatively small percentage of their respective service and of the total military pilots with fixed-wing experience. The term *fixed-wing pilot* refers to aviators who fly airplanes, versus *rotary pilots* who fly helicopters.

Data from 2015 informs us that there is no absence of reports concerning the 1,500 pilot shortage the USAF is facing (Carr, 2015), an issue that is currently expected to continue at a steady decline (Losey, 2017). A March 2015 Senate Armed Services committee testimony by senior Air Force leadership explained the criticality of the dilemma:

The shortfall evolved from force structure reductions that cut active duty fighter squadrons and fighter training squadrons to a number that cannot sustain billet requirements. As a result, the Air Force is currently unable to produce and experience the required number of fighter pilots across the total force (Everstine, 2015, para. 3).

This has led the USAF to desperately search for non-damaging solutions to correct the crisis (Fiscal Year, 2015).

### **Summary**

Over the past five years, the U.S. Air Force has failed to reach its pilot retention goals. Recent data indicates that retention problems will only continue to slip further below desired outcomes (Lessig, 2018). Further research suggests that even senior Air Force leadership understands that pilots are leaving due to a plethora of factors.

Secretary of the Air Force Dr. Heather Wilson points to the following as key evidence for

poor retention, “Long and too frequent combat deployments, inadequate pay and benefits, and the associated temptation for military pilots to take better-paying airline jobs” (as cited in Axe, 2018, p. 2). Research towards solving the crisis has been prolific for a military service that prides itself in academic endeavors. One such study determined that the key elements that determine the size of the pilot inventory are the capacity to train new pilots (production), the capacity to introduce new pilots into organizational units and give them enough flying time to turn them into experienced pilots (absorption), and the retention of experienced pilots (sustainment) that largely determines how many new pilots are required each year (Robbert, Rosello, Anderegg, Ausink, Bigelow, Taylor, and Pita, 2015). This study focused on the latter; the retention of experienced pilots, specifically in the B-2 community.

The USAF needs to aggressively pursue initiatives to fix declining pilot retention. The discussion has moved into criticality and is impacting the service’s ability to promise national defense. Overwhelmingly, the highest priority, and most direct issue for service leaders to face and address is the steep decline in retention of its primary warfighters. This is only underscored by recent research, which shows how critical this issue is to both the USAF and national security.

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the present study and established the importance of examining pilot retention myopically focused on the B-2 pilot community. Chapter 2 explores the history of the national pilot retention crisis, the various implications of such a deficit, and its impact on other services. The literature review also examined talent retention as an organizational focus outside of the military. Chapter 3 introduces the research methodology and rationale for selecting a grounded theory

approach. It provides information about the sample size, the data collection and analysis process, as well as the research question introduced in this qualitative study. Chapter 4 discusses the findings of the research. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings and the implications of these findings for the retention of B-2 pilots. This chapter also discusses future research considerations.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

This literature review provides background information of past and present retention efforts in various settings throughout the United States, including the DoD, and the civilian workplace. Discussions examine the professional practice problem of negative pilot retention within the United States Air Force (USAF), while taking a broader look at talent retention as a primary focus for other major organizations. The initial subsection looks at the history of declining retention in the USAF as it relates to the crisis from 2007-2017. The second subsection provides a brief review of retention concerns as they apply to the other U.S. armed services. The third section looks at retention concerns in the civilian marketplace, focusing on retention strategies used by businesses in the education and medical fields. The researcher accomplished this literature review from the perspective of his professional practice setting, stemming from previous experience as a B-2 pilot.

### **A Look Back at Declining Retention**

The USAF's division of public affairs has been on damage control since the mid-2000s concerning the reported 1,500 pilot shortage facing the air service (Parish, 2017). A critical issue now for several years, the pilot shortage is expected to get even worse ("Military Pilot Shortage," 2017). In a March 2015 Senate Armed Services committee testimony by senior Air Force leadership, the criticality of the dilemma was carefully explained:

The shortfall evolved from force structure reductions that cut active duty fighter squadrons and fighter training squadrons to a number that cannot sustain billet

requirements. As a result, the Air Force is currently unable to produce and experience the required number of fighter pilots across the total force. (“Fiscal Year 2015,” para. 3).

Most recently, this has led the service to desperately search for non-damaging solutions to correct the crisis.

Research shows that specific indicators affecting retention are (a) financial factors, (b) pay and benefits, (c) relatively higher private sector wages, (d) social and psychological factors, (e) and a mismatch between individual interest and job assignment (Sminchise, 2016). Overall, the reason why many officers decide to leave the military is not financial; however, the top three solutions presented are, increase pay and benefits, increase family care and quality of life programs, and improved selection and classification measures for assignments (Sminchise, 2016). Thematically, we see financial, cultural, and professional issues emerge as the three most commonly shared impetuses which most impact retention within the USAF pilot corps (Bluedorn, 1982; Bonnell & Hendrick, 1981; Cromer & Julicher, 1982; Sminchise, 2016; Stone, Wiggins, Turner-Holland, & Looper, 1998).

In 2015, the U.S. Secretary of Defense sponsored a study by The RAND Corporation to research the pilot retention crisis (Robbert et al., 2015). The conclusion reached by the study indicated that increases in commercial airline pilot hiring has had significant impacts on retention rates of military pilots (Elliot, Kapur, & Gresenz, 2004). The data shows that as airline hiring increases, military pilot retention rates decrease as rated personnel leave the armed services for a career in commercial aviation (“Military Pilot Shortage,” 2017). As the demand for commercial pilots increase, the Department of

Defense's ability to retain its optimum pilot quota levels becomes more difficult. Major airlines prefer hiring pilots who have the experience that comes with thousands of flight hours in high-performance, fixed-wing aircraft (Hodges, 2015). This experience is also a requirement imposed by the Federal Aviation Administration to ensure the safety of passengers, cargo, and people on the ground (Patterson, 2012). After the post-9/11 aviation industry collapse, the U.S. military services offered the only source of experienced pilots from which to draw (Tyler, 2017). Airline industry experts are forecasting a significant increase in new hires over the next decade, which will further exaggerate the military's retention problem (McGee, 2015). With the estimated cost of training one fighter pilot in the USAF at over \$6 million (Griffin, 2013), the military has a lot at stake. The 2010 RAND study estimated that, without changes to current policies, the USAF will have a 1,000 pilot shortfall by 2022, and the United States Navy (USN) will have already experienced a 10% shortage (McGee, 2015). Parish (2017) confirms that rate of decline by showing a deficit of 1,500 as of 2016 and 2,100 as of 2017 (Woody, 2018).

The military is able to increase its pilot retention rate by increasing financial compensation (Elliot et al., 2004). If increasing military pay increases retention, then significant decreases in retention can be attributed to perceived pay disparity between the airlines and military. The lure of high paying jobs, performing focused aviation related tasks, coupled with excellent benefits are attractive to military pilots looking to improve their financial situations. Fullerton (2003) concluded that the biggest reasons for pilot attrition are the economic factors of pay differences between the USAF and airlines, economic strength, and airline hiring.

The compensation profile for pilots between the military and airlines contrasts sharply, and many military personnel believe that pay from a major airline significantly enhances their current financial situations (Farrier, 2016). A simple glance at the average captain pay of a major airline is a convincing motivator to start a career with the airlines. Captains of large aircraft with a major airline can make over \$200,000 annually, with the potential for more given seniority and airline profitability (Hodges, 2015). When officers in the service compare that amount to their current salaries, the military cannot compete financially. At the same time, compensation alone does not address the quality of life and other intrinsic motivators that might weigh in a military pilot's decision to leave the service (Ostrower, 2017; Sminchise, 2016). Another question worth considering is whether a pilot should leave the service at the first opportunity, or wait until retirement before going to the airlines? The decrease in retention rates suggest they are leaving prior to retirement, although it is not the most financially advantageous decision (Sminchise, 2016). The choice of a military pilot to separate from the service results in a decreased individual lifetime earnings in unrealized retirement funds. Importantly, it also represents an increased cost to the services by millions of dollars, as they are required to train a greater number of pilots (Hodges, 2015).

The 2015 RAND study also found the large majority of military pilot attrition occurred within a year of completing their active duty service commitment (ADSC) (Elliot et al., 2004). Much of this is due to the job market available to pilots after ADSC completion and the drop off nature of military retirement. As the economic conditions and outlook continue to improve across the country, and specifically in the airline

industry, there is likely to be a large increase in demand for the highly trained pilots in the military (Sweeney, 2015).

Despite the current retention state, the previous decade had a favorable environment for military pilot retention (Griffin, 2013). Airline pilot hiring was historically low as the economy experienced a recession. In 2009, there were only 30 new hires across the major airlines, compared with over 3,000 new hires in 2014. Compared to the 1990s, the industry averaged four to five thousand new hires each year (Floyd, 2018). Aircraft manufacturer Boeing estimates that the need for new commercial airline pilots will increase to 498,000 globally by the year 2032 (Durrani, 2014). Airline industry analysts are forecasting a shortage of pilots needed in commercial aviation (Sweeney, 2015). This trend should not only result in an increase in the number of pilots hired, but also in the pay that commercial pilots receive. This environment will likely make it harder for the services to retain highly trained pilots as they are lured by the financial compensation of a major airline.

### **Inter-Departmental Retention Issues**

The ability of an organization to retain its employees cannot be overstated. Cardy and Lengnick-Hall (2011) stress this point by saying that human capital is one of the few remaining resources that can help an organization maintain a competitive advantage. Maintaining this resource is critical, not just for the organization's overall success, but also due to the costs incurred from the constant turn-over of highly qualified employees (Cardy & Lengnick-Hall, 2011). No organization is immune from the risks associated with turnover, to include the government.

While a majority of the attention has been focused on the USAF, the USN and U.S Marine Corps (USMC) have also been struggling to make retention milestones (James & Goldfein, 2016). According to a 2018 Government Accounting Officer (GAO) report, the Navy has similar problems with its fighter pilot manning levels. In 2013, the Navy was short 57 fighter pilots, 12% of its manning, and by 2017 the gap had increased to 136 pilots, or 26% short of what the Navy was authorized. Similarly, the USMC saw a sharp decline in pilot authorization levels in 2012 and were dwindling at 76% manning by the end of 2017. The USMC considers units manned fewer than 85% as “unhealthy” and the USAF calls anything less than 100% of its authorizations “insufficiently staffed” (Losey, 2018b).

Other military services will be burdened with retention challenges of all pilots, not just those that are fixed-wing trained (Hodges, 2015). The vast majority of military fixed-wing pilots meet the preferred application criteria of a major airline, but other pilots could become competitive for airline hiring by acquiring more fixed-wing flight time, in or out of the service. All USAF, USN, and USMC pilots start flight school and gain experience flying an airplane. Helicopter pilots can still obtain employment flying with smaller, regional airlines and then use that experience to build preferred fixed-wing time desired by the major airlines. The time spent with a smaller airline is significantly less in salary, but it could be for a very short time relative to an entire career of professional pilot earnings and worth the temporary setback (Floyd, 2018). Thus, increases in major airline hiring not only impact fixed-wing pilot attrition rates, but also all pilot attrition rates across all military services.

The military pilot has a significant life decision to make at ADSC completion. They are already halfway to retirement eligibility, and have experienced several relocations, multiple deployments, and family and personal changes, including marriage and children (Sweeney, 2015). Military pilots have limited input in their duty stations, deployment lengths and frequency, and always have the potential of fighting in national conflicts and wars (Taylor, Moore & Roll, 2000). However, the government's role in the retention issue cannot be overlooked. Financial hardships, and quality of life complaints have stemmed from massive military cutbacks as a result of the Budget Control Act of 2011, directly influencing retention trends.

### **National Defense Implications**

As signed into law by President Obama, The Budget Control Act of 2011 (BCA) is a federal statute enacted on August 2, 2011. The purpose of the act was to bring clarity and conclusion to the debt-ceiling crisis that occurred in 2011, a situation that would have led to the United States defaulting on national debts (Budget Control Act of 2011, 2016). The act came under immense pressure from both Democrats and Republicans after alternative plans and negotiations failed. Previous attempts, the Obama-Boehner \$4 trillion "Grand Bargain," the House Republican Cut, Cap and Balance Act, and the McConnell-Reid "Plan B" fallback, were all failures when both parties were unable to agree on the terms (Budget Control Act of 2011, 2016). It took an impending deadline and a plan with which both parties could work to pass the bill. The Republicans were forcibly lobbying for spending reduction, and agreed to raise the debt ceiling to be guaranteed long-term fiscal restraint.

The BCA was never a plan to reduce the national debt, but rather it was a mechanism to reduce the rate of growth of debt. By design it will reduce federal spending in two major areas, within the Department of Defense (DoD), and domestically across a variety of departments. Areas excluded from sequester effects include social security, civil and military employee pay, veterans programs and Medicaid (HuffPost Live, 2013). The DoD has a heavy cost in relationship to national spending. Defense accounted for 20% of national spending in 2013, with social security also claiming 20%, and Medicare, Medicaid, and other medical programs gaining 21% of the budget. Since social security and other medical areas were protected, defense was the most likely area for widespread cuts (Plumer, 2013).

These deep budget cuts were felt in the USAF. It is cause for concern as addressed by Air Force director of budget, Major General Jim Martin, who in 2014 stated, “Throughout every step of the process we worked hard to make every dollar count so we could protect the minimum capabilities for today’s war fighting efforts, while also investing in capabilities needed to defeat potential threats in the future” (United States Air Force Personnel Center, 2014, p. 4). Despite the budgetary setbacks, the U.S. still spends more on defense than the next 13 countries combined, including China and Russia (Plumer, 2013). This declaration has some lawmakers convinced that the BCA will have deeply penetrating effects on strategic readiness (Plumer, 2013).

Since entering lasting conflict in 2001, the military has been getting smaller and smaller (Coleman, 2014). This is counterintuitive as we seek obligatory defense of our global allies, prosecute nations for human rights violations, extend humanitarian aid to devastated nations in natural disasters, and provide common defense to the homeland.

Total force numbers have dwindled and are currently 60% lower than our readiness state in 1968 (Coleman, 2014). As the BCA continues to squeeze military leaders in to making critical budgetary decisions, it is clear that we can either have a large fighting force, or a modern force – but not both. The decision to lower the overall total strength of the military is on-going, but according to then USAF Chief of Staff General Mark A. Welsh III, the USAF's top budgetary priorities are, F-35 Lightning II, KC-46 Pegasus and the long-range strike bomber (Military Spot, 2016).

The USAF's pivot towards modernization poses another substantial risk, personnel management. As the military draws down in numbers, and continues to engage globally, individuals are being asked to do more with less. This added stress is crushing morale and the ability for families to bounce back between deployments (Lamothe, 2016). In a squadron that used to have 35 assigned pilots, there are now only 20, and the taskings are greater than before. There are no available bodies to fill vacancies. Due to the BCA, leaders are also forced to prioritize between modernizing an aging fleet or providing manning relief. In a testimony to Congress, then Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James stated:

Bottom line here is that...we are fully engaged in every region of the world, in every mission area, across the full spectrum of military operations. Put simply: we have never been busier on such a sustained and such a global basis. (Military Spot, 2016, p.11).

This is not just a problem faced by the USAF. The Army is also feeling the pressure brought forward by the BCA. In a 2015 testimony in front of congress, Army Chief of Staff General Ray Odierno stated:

Today, only 33% of our brigades are ready, when our sustained readiness levels should be closer to 70%. We have fewer soldiers, the majority of whom are in units that are not ready, and they are manning aging equipment at a time when the demand for Army forces is much higher than anticipated. The President's 2016 budget represents the bare minimum needed for the Army to carry out its missions and meet the requirements of the national defense strategy. (Tan, 2015, p.5).

The BCA may have long term damaging impacts on national defense and readiness. What began as a political disagreement is becoming an honest concern regarding America's status as a world superpower (Warwick, 2017). The outcry from military leadership and civilian representatives appear to be ineffective in altering the legislative work. In best estimates the sequester will continue, and the military services will have to learn to operate as a leaner, less lethal force. If a complete withdrawal from the Middle East ever occurs, it will be an opportunity for lawmakers to reassess the functional readiness and usefulness of a tired military. If the U.S. is ever challenged by a like-peer state, it may be too late to build enough ships or aircraft, or train enough soldiers needed to win a long war against them (Warwick, 2017).

### **Civilian Talent Retention**

#### **Job Satisfaction**

An important factor in retention is job satisfaction, defined by Pool (1997) as, "an attitude that individuals maintain about their jobs" (p. 272). Khalid, Pahi, and Ahmed (2016) provide a study showing that leaders create a, "climate of retention," a mediating factor of which is an employee's level of job satisfaction (p. 611). This supports the idea that job satisfaction has a certain amount of influence on employee's decision to stay with

an organization. Knowing this, it becomes important to understand the factors leaders can control that have an impact on job satisfaction. Pool (1997) aids in this search by looking at the relationship between job satisfaction, leadership styles, and work motivation. His research concluded that the most important factor in job satisfaction was work motivation, with leadership behavior coming in second, and that task substitutes (unambiguous work tasks, feedback, etc.) also had a positive relationship (Pool, 1997).

Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002) outline two key hypotheses that were analyzed as a part of their research study that examined talent retention in the civilian marketplace. Hypothesis one stated, “Business-unit employee satisfaction and engagement will have positive average correlations with the business-unit outcomes of customer satisfaction, productivity, profit, employee retention, and employee safety” (p.269). The second hypothesis stated:

The correlations between employee satisfaction and engagement and business-unit outcomes will generalize across organizations for all business-unit outcomes. That is, these correlations will not vary substantially across organizations, and in particular, there will be few if any organizations with zero or negative correlations. (Harter et al., 2002, p. 276).

It was concluded that employee satisfaction and engagement are related to meaningful business outcomes at a magnitude that is important to many organizations and that these correlations generalize across companies; thus proving both hypotheses to be true.

The main purpose of the study conducted by Harter et al. (2002) was to seek correlation between job satisfaction and job performance. With the stated hypotheses, the

authors used customer, profit, productivity, turnover, and safety as key indicators of job satisfaction and engagement. Overall, job satisfaction, and engagement were assessed by a single overall figure. The strongest effects were found relative to employee turnover, customer satisfaction-loyalty, and safety. Correlations in these areas were positive relative to productivity and profitability, but were of lower magnitude, perhaps as a function of alternative variables not examined by the scope of this study. Interestingly, the variables concluded show near exact similarities between satisfaction and engagement. These findings indicate that both of the hypotheses were supported in this study.

Judge, Thoresen, Bono, and Patton (2001) seek to expand on past research done in the field of quantitative job satisfaction. This relationship between job satisfaction, and job performance has been called the “holy grail” of relationships by industry psychologists (Landy, 1989). Judge et al. (2001) aim to assess whether the satisfaction/performance relationship is as important as many researchers claim it to be. Given the current review and consistency provided by their research, it was determined that the magnitude of the satisfaction-performance relationship has been drastically lessened, and the relationship may not be as important as researchers once thought (Atchison & Lefferts, 1972; Chen, Sparrow, & Cooper 2016; Saeed, Waseem, Sikander, & Rizwan, 2014).

Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman’s (1959) two-factor theory explores the factors influencing retention of highly skilled employees. Herzberg et al. (1959) proposed that certain factors in a workplace cause job dissatisfaction, while other factors cause job satisfaction. Chen et al. (2016) proposed that reducing stress was the biggest

influence on higher job satisfaction. Herzberg's two-factor theory helped explore key predictors that influence individuals to remain at a job. Herzberg's theory resonates with Maslow's theory of motivation and can be used to support the mental health and wellbeing of workers in a given industry (Herzberg et al., 1959). In 1959, Herzberg et al. studied worker responses to two factors for job satisfaction—motivation (intrinsic), and hygiene (extrinsic). Putra, Cho, and Liu (2015) found that highly skilled workers with complicated tasks have intrinsic motivation, while low-level, unskilled workers have extrinsic motivation. In the two-factor theory, Herzberg et al. suggested certain aspects of work led to job dissatisfaction, and separate features led to job satisfaction (Lumadi, 2014). Herzberg et al. identified features of job satisfaction as motivators, and aspects of job dissatisfaction as hygiene factors. Hygiene factors include (a) policy and administration, (b) quality of supervision, (c) pay or salary, (d) relationship with others, (e) work conditions, and (f) job security (Herzberg et al., 1959; Mitchell, 2013). Motivators include (a) achievement, (b) recognition, (c) responsibility, and (d) growth and advancement (Herzberg et al., 1959; Mitchell, 2013).

The factors of hygiene and motivation are the attributes of Herzberg's theory. Hygiene factors, also known as maintenance factors, are related to the organization or environment and the specifics of the job, and are extrinsic (Smith & Shields, 2013). An increase in hygiene factors will not motivate an employee, but may reduce job dissatisfaction (Mitchell, 2013). Hooi and Leong (2015) found that competitive wages and benefits did not help to retain workers. Herzberg et al. (1959) emphasized that the opposite of job dissatisfaction was not the satisfaction of the job, but rather no job

dissatisfaction. Herzberg et al. studied 203 accountants and asked participants when they felt good or bad about a project or the job.

According to Herzberg et al. (1959) when participants discussed occurrences with bad feelings, the issues were external and aligned with hygiene factors. Job dissatisfactions were extrinsic and included items such as company policies, working conditions, security, and status (Herzberg et al., 1959). Hygiene factors include the quality of the supervisor or physical work conditions, and when absent can create job dissatisfaction (Dasgupta, Suar, & Singh, 2014). Herzberg et al. (1959) concluded that the presence of hygiene factors does not motivate or create satisfaction. Smith and Shields (2013) found that when employees had job dissatisfaction, the problems were hygiene factors. Intention to leave reduces when employees are not dissatisfied with hygiene factors such as working conditions (Liu, Aunguroch, & Yunibhand, 2015; Saeed, et al., 2014). Alverén, Andersson, Eriksson, Sandoff, and Wikhamn (2012) found good pay did not lead to job satisfaction, but did prevent job dissatisfaction, while Thomas, Brown, and Thomas (2017) found that poor salary contributed to job dissatisfaction. In contrast, Chen and Wang (2015) found that seasonal workers' hygiene factors of high pay and scenic working environments were satisfiers. Bhatia and Purohit (2014) found the two most preferred hygiene factors were job security and acceptable salary. Employee pay, working conditions, concern for job security, or quality of the supervisor contribute little to job satisfaction, but are contributors of job dissatisfaction (Mitchell, 2013).

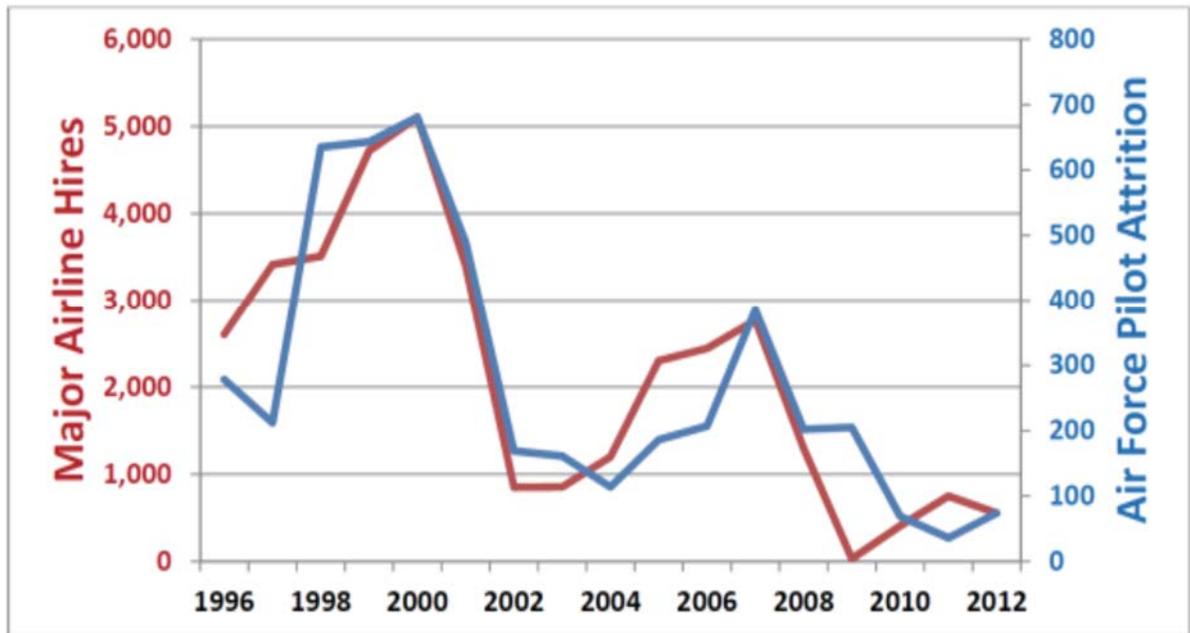
Motivating factors may create job satisfaction and increase the intention to remain in an organization. According to Herzberg et al. (1959) in their study of accountants and

engineers, intrinsic job satisfactions included opportunities for advancement or growth, interesting work, recognition, and responsibility. Work that is not challenging or meaningful reduces employee motivation and job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959; Putra et al., 2015). Intrinsic motivation originates from within an individual and includes personal views, religious beliefs, and political factors (Hazra, Sengupta, & Ghosh, 2014). Motivational factors such as camaraderie, responsibility, and acknowledgment by supervisors can compensate for the lack of hygiene factors (Alverén et al., 2012).

### **Literature about the Professional Practice Setting**

Current USAF statistics substantiate the increasing pilot deficit. The service is 1,947 pilots short of its authorized strength across all platforms as of September 2017 (Hoadley, 2017). The shortage is most prominent among fighter pilots and the service predicts it will be 1,055 fighter pilots short of 3,781 authorized by the end of FY2017, following a deficiency of 873 in FY2016 (Hoadley, 2017). The Air Force Chief of Staff, General David Goldfein cautions, "The Air Force is as busy as we have ever been, but we are also smaller than we have ever been. Consequently, we have less margin for error when it comes to filling our cockpits" (James & Goldfein, 2016). Analysts point to a number of factors driving the USAF pilot shortage, chief among them an increase in demand for commercial airline pilots. Figure 1 illustrates the historical correlation between airline hiring and USAF pilot attrition, which creates concern that the shortage will only grow given predictions for sustained industry growth (Sweeney, 2015).

Figure 1. Major Airline Pilot Hiring Versus Air Force Pilot Attrition



Adapted from Nolan J. Sweeney, "Predicting Active Duty Air Force Pilot Attrition," RAND, 2015.

Availability of civilian jobs is only one possible factor energizing attrition.

Preliminary exit survey results indicate that Air Force pilots are motivated to separate primarily by "cultural issues that affect quality of life and service" ("Aircrew Crisis", 2018). Survey respondents also cited dissatisfaction with excessive duties unrelated to flying and inability to maintain work-life balance ("Aircrew Crisis", 2018). In response to the shortage, the Air Force created an Aircrew Crisis Task Force to focus on retention, new pilot production, and reducing administrative requirements. Specific initiatives include reducing requirements for fighter pilots to fill 365-day deployments; reducing off-station exercises; cutting administrative duties and ancillary training; hiring contractors to handle administrative requirements; increasing training capacity with new

squadrons and incentives for instructor duty; and engaging with industry on cooperative solutions (Clark, 2017).

The USAF is also asking Congress to modify monetary incentives, which fall into two categories (a) Aviation Incentive Pay (AIP), a monthly supplement that scales with years of service, and (b) the Aviation Retention Pay Program (ARP), an annual supplement contingent upon pilots extending their active duty service commitment (Hoadley, 2017). The FY2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) increased maximum AIP to \$1,000 per month and increased the ARP to \$35,000 per year (an increase of \$10,000). It also mandated a "business case analysis" for future requests to increase the ARP. The resulting study concluded that an ARP between \$38,500 and \$62,500 would reverse the attrition trend and account for uncertainty in airline growth (Mattock, Hosek, Asch, & Karam, 2016). The House-passed version of the FY2018 NDAA would raise the ARP to \$50,000 per year. In contrast, the committee-reported Senate bill would require further justification before implementing a raise, to include a breakout of the bonus required by aircraft type, a tiered limitation to the bonus depending on anticipated shortfalls, and a description of the nonmonetary means the service is using to address attrition (Mattock, et al., 2016).

The current Aviators Retention Pay (ARP) policy is under particular scrutiny – which already serves as the service's mechanism to retain rated airmen (Mattock, et al., 2016). This has become a controversial policy within the USAF in recent years due to the increased retirement rate of the baby-boomer generation from commercial aviation (Sweeney, 2017). Coupled with an increased demand on military pilots, high deployment rates, a decade and a half of wars in the Middle East, and a specific lack of experienced

pilots to backfill the commercial exodus, the USAF is quickly running out of experienced pilots (Durrani, 2017; Hodges, 2016; Sweeney, 2017). This backdraft effect is sending Air Force leadership frantically searching for a solution, fearing that declining fighter pilot retention is just, “the canary in the coal mine” (Philpott, 2017, para. 6). However, as a military service within the DoD the USAF is unable to match the financial gains made by pilots who leave the military. For example, an Air Force pilot who leaves the military at 12 years of service for a position at Delta Airlines would be making approximately \$190,000 annually after eight years. In the same amount of time, if the same pilot stayed in the service would be making approximately \$100,000 at the 20 years of service point (Defense Finance and Accounting Service [DFAS], 2016; Farrier, 2016; Griffin, 2013). To help compete, Congress has authorized a pay bonus for eligible pilots to remain in the service and retain their experience, knowledge, and credibility (Mattock, et al., 2016).

Since 1999 the USAF has not seen an increase in the ARP, something that has bothered pilots within the organization (Losey, 2017). The ARP has remained constant for nearly 17 years, failing to rise with inflation. The difference, if inflation were included, would be nearly a \$10,000 increase. A raise in the ARP is easier said than done within a large bureaucratic organization. Despite policy successes, a fragmented U.S. political system makes it difficult for policy makers to respond to most public problems in a timely and coherent manner (Kraft & Furlong, 2015). The concept of improving the ARP to catch up to current and modern financial needs and improve the appeal of military pilots for retention is a policy problem that impacts the USAF.

**Retention**

An Air Force watchdog site has been reporting about the Air Force pilot retention crisis since mid-September 2015 (Carr, 2015). Fighter pilots are bailing out of the Air Force at the highest rate compared to other pilots in bomber, mobility, and special operations aircraft. Moreover, the service is aggressively trying to stabilize its Remotely Piloted Aircraft platforms without resorting to abusive personnel practices that underline retention concerns. Air Staff generals not long ago dissolved commander prerogatives allowing protection of their key pilots from deployment rotations. This policy revoked commander's ability to protect their combat coded pilots from being deployed for non-flying duties, essentially stripping pilots from the squadrons where they are most needed. Most recently, a provision authorized under the "Stop Loss" section of the U.S. Code was stealthily invoked to prevent officers from retiring under some circumstances — requiring that they first deploy on a six- or twelve-month rotation (Carr, 2015).

Meanwhile, the economy is rebounding. Separation programs offered in 2014 were popular among pilots, and the service inexplicably allowed hundreds to leave while involuntarily jettisoning others. "Take rates" for pilot bonus programs continue to tumble, with nearly 62% of pilots who were eligible to leave the service in fiscal year 2015 choosing to depart. This drove inventory down by a total of 345 pilots (Carr, 2014). All signs point to a crisis of pilot manning that could preclude the Air Force from fulfilling its future mission. Accordingly, the service should be in an all-out emergency push to reverse the trend. Against this backdrop, former Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF) General Mark Welsh III delivered remarks in October 2015 at Sheppard Air Force Base in a small group interaction that included roughly a dozen pilots. During

his scheduled visit, Welsh discussed the pilot retention problem in stark terms, telling those in attendance that, “we [the Air Force] can’t compete.” He reportedly made it clear that he did not think the Air Force could stay apace with airline competitors in terms of pay, operational tempo, or lifestyle stability (Carr, 2014).

### **Leadership Literature**

An important emphasis should be made on leadership behavior versus specific leadership traits. Behaviors are modeled, whereas traits tend to be personally inherent (Robbins & Judge, 2016). According to Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011), leadership is also not just a matter of being, it is also a matter of doing. Leadership depends on acting for the group. This ideal implies a level of selflessness that portrays the leader in a position of outward influence, instead of inward characteristics. Although the DoD’s foundation for behavioral leadership change was centered on sexual assault eradication, the USAF has benefited from concentrating on action-based leadership.

In an ideal environment, servant leaders would run wild, but in reality the organization contends with a variety of leadership approaches, theories, and traits. The servant leadership philosophy dictates that a leader shares power, puts the needs of others first, and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible (Greenleaf, 1991). When leaders shift their mindset to serve first, they unlock purpose and ingenuity in those around them, resulting in higher performing and more fulfilled employees (Gillet, Cartwright, & Van Vugt, 2011). To effectively engage these employees, the ideals of trustworthiness, idealized influence, authenticity, and decisiveness are critical leadership behaviors required to lead in 2017.

## **Behaviors versus Traits**

### **Trustworthiness**

A trusting relationship is directly related to measures of communication management, suggesting that employees receiving positive communication are more likely to be motivated to form trusting relationships with their leadership team (Jo & Shim, 2005). This study provides central support for the importance of building trusting relationships between management and employees in several ways. First, employees perceive a trusting relationship when they experience interpersonal communication about the organization from their supervisors. This study shows that useful instruction, helpful advice, and sharing organizational news with employees will enhance management's relationship with employees (Jo & Shim, 2005). Secondly, interpersonal interaction between management and employees might be more important than formal mediated channels in bringing organizational information to employees. These formed relationships facilitate dialogue that has become the new public relations forum for the employee / management team (Robbins & Judge, 2016).

### **Idealized Influence**

At Air University, the USAF's academic center of excellence, the Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM) is a core-learning outcome. The FRLM is a conglomerate of ideas generated to sculpt transformational leaders through action. More specifically, the USAF seeks to create leaders who embody the idealized influence characteristic of transformational leadership (Stone et al., 1998). Transformational leaders embody the true spirit of leadership. They put followers' needs above their own, and their behavior is consistent with the values and principles of the group reaffirming shared commitment to

the organization's mission (Johnson, 2015). Determining the USAF's commitment to ethics would be an extension of idealized influence, or *walk-the-walk* leadership. The behaviors exhibited by leaders would be a logical flow from educating members of the organization to the enforcement of the ethical standards established by the service's core values (Toner, 2006)

Transformational leadership has been added to the curriculum of the U.S. Air Force Academy, and the USAF has examined officers who are transformational leaders because they serve as role models for the cadets (Bass, 1990). Transactional leaders demonstrate two key leadership styles, management by exception, and contingent reward. Whereas these methods can both be effective, the USAF has determined that transformational leadership is the preferred style (Stone et al., 1998). When a leader models the walk-the-walk approach to transformational leadership, they are directly demonstrating behaviors that lead to organizational success.

### **Authenticity**

A 2016 survey by the Society of Human Resource Management shows that employee recognition and engagement is key to retaining good employees ("Society", 2016). Although 51% of supervisors say they recognize employees who do a good job, only 17% of the employees at the same organizations report that their supervisors do well at recognizing them ("Society", 2016). An astounding 64% of Americans who leave their jobs say they do so because they do not feel appreciated (Fagley & Adler, 2012; Robbins, 2000). The USAF is no different, and exit surveys are communicating the same sentiments. In fact, of the top five reasons why Airman left the service in 2015, four of them were directly related to a lack of appreciation ("Military Pilot Shortage," 2017).

Traditional approaches to employee recognition may need to be reevaluated. Continuing these activities may actually increase negativity within the work environment (White, 2014a). Learning what each individual employee values and then communicating appreciation to them in ways that are perceived as authentic is critical to having a positive result (White, 2014a). This approach defines the leadership philosophy of authentic appreciation, wherein appreciation is tailored towards the individual's physiological, social, and behavioral needs. White (2014b) contends that four conditions need to be present in order for a team member to feel appreciated: (a) appreciation is communicated regularly, (b) through language and action important to the recipient, (c) personal and individualized, and (d) feels authentic. Authenticity engages directly with subordinates, and by definition focuses the leader on the needs of those they are serving (Chapman & White, 2011).

### **Decisiveness**

Critical thinking skills are essential leadership tools, and are crucial to leadership core competence (Miller & Tucker, 2015). Decisiveness within the decision-making process is a hallmark behavior of a leader, and fundamental to the military mind. Colonel John Boyd is best known for his *OODA loop*, which describes a recursive process for applying cognitive skills when making decisions or solving problems (Maccuish, 2012). His theory can be translated to many situations that require continuous processing and feedback. OODA stands for observe, orient, decide, and act. *Observe* is the step when the leader detects the unfolding circumstances and gathers outside information. Under the *orient* stage the leader examines new information, pulls from previous experience, and analyzes and synthesizes information. When the leader moves to the *decide* phase,

he is hypothesizing the best course of action, and then acts upon it by testing and evaluation the hypothesis (Maccuish, 2012). This process is continual, and numerous cycles occur during a single decision-making scenario.

Under this premise, decisiveness is a categorical leadership behavior, not a trait. Necessary for timeliness, and critical to the battlefield, decisiveness can be modeled and demonstrated through a leader's ethical actions (Gibson & Weber, 2015). To improve the ethical decision-making of employees, managers must model ethical decision-making to encourage ethical behavior in their subordinates (Sims & Keon, 1999). USAF employees facing an ethical dilemma know that ethical decisions will be rewarded and unethical behavior will not be tolerated. This is a driving factor behind the USAF's first core value of *integrity first*, which keeps its leaders focused on modeling positive behaviors to their subordinates (Toner, 2006).

### **Summary**

This literature review analyzed various aspects of the pilot retention crisis. It seeks to provide context to the negative pilot retention trends through a historic look at where the problem originated, and where it is heading. Additionally, we examined talent retention in the civilian workplace proving that retention of talented employees transcends the military. The four behaviors of trustworthiness, idealized influence, authenticity, and decisiveness were examined for their influence on a leader's ability to effectively lead and motivate a winning team – a requirement to halt declining retention. The argument must be made for focusing on leadership behaviors in order to safeguard mission success, and lethality through engaging employee relationships. Emphasis on leadership behaviors reinforces desired subordinate actions required for mission

accomplishment. A visionary leader with the ability to think and plan strategically is invaluable to an organization's success. The criticality of how that leader demonstrates these qualities are both understated and under taught, and thus leadership training tends to emphasize leadership qualities, over behaviors. To keep the organization focused on the needs of those it serves, its leaders should focus on demonstrating trustworthiness, idealized influence, authenticity, and decisiveness.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

**Introduction**

The focus group of the current study was B-2 pilots plus or minus one year of their UPT ADSC expiration. The participants that were within one year of their contract expiring had yet to agree to stay. Additionally, participants that have chosen to stay or leave after the expiration of their initial contract have taken one of three separate paths. They have either (a) taken the aviators retention bonus (ARP) and are under a defined contract for a specific number of additional years of service, (b) have not signed a contract, nor accepted the ARP, but are continuing to serve on a year to year basis, or (c) have separated from the USAF (Pawlyk, 2016).

Each of these groups represents a different indicator as to why they would leave, or are continuing to serve. By interviewing this specific group, the researcher could best theorize why a trend in retention exists. The exact number of B-2 pilots currently flying the aircraft is classified. However, there is no necessity to interview all pilots who are currently flying, when the specific sample of interest are those approaching the expiration of the UPT ADCS. This group represents the retainable, the retained, or the non-retained. Their answers to the interview questions found in Appendix A assisted the researcher in creating an evidence-based theory regarding the retention trend in the B-2 community.

The participant sample size was 14 B-2 pilots. The focused participation group was B-2 pilots in the 2006 and 2007 fiscal year groups. The justification for this range is that the 2006-year group's ADSC will be expiring in 2017, and the 2007-year group's ADSC will be expiring in 2018. These two groups represent the ideal date range for assessing the research question.

### **Research Question**

The current study was not intended to be an indictment of former, current, or future leadership; but rather to serve as an evidence-based source of true and current data regarding the viewpoints of current B-2 pilots. This study also was not designed to solve, or inform the national pilot retention dilemma, or act as a historic look back at where we have been, but rather where are we going. To retain a manageable scope of the study, the researcher sought to answer the following question: Why are B-2 pilots in the USAF opting to leave the service at the expiration of their Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training (SUPT) Active Duty Service Commitment (ADSC)?

### **Research Design**

Grounded theory was chosen as the methodology for the current study as it provides for an in-depth exploration of the process and leads to a deep understanding of the pilot retention problem. The theory developed through this study may be used by future military leaders seeking to transform their organization and retain military pilots.

Data collection for this study was gathered during multiple interviews using a protocol based on Creswell's (2014) qualitative research techniques. The interviews were semi-structured and consisted of qualitative open-ended questions. The researcher structured the questions in an effort to narrowly focus on member's intentions to stay or leave the USAF after their initial under graduate pilot training (UPT) active duty service commitment (ADSC) expires. This data indicated whether or not a positive or negative retention trend existed within the B-2 pilot community and identify the key catalysts.

The interviews were conducted over the course of two weeks in the Spring of 2018, primarily over the phone, and on occasion in person. The location of the interview

was specifically designated by the researcher to eliminate potential benefits or flaws regarding where the interview took place, and how the interviewee responds (Babbie, 2017; Leech, 2002). Some interviews were planned to be conducted over the phone with B-2 pilots who are no longer stationed at WAFB, but could offer insights into why they elected to leave or stay in the community. Due to restricted and dynamic schedules, a majority of the interviews were conducted over the phone at a time determined by the interviewee.

All of the interviews were audio recorded using a TOOBOM V01 ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)) digital voice recorder paired with a Lavalier clip-on microphone for enhanced clarity and accuracy. Additionally, an iPhone 5 ([www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com)) was used as a backup recording device to guarantee a captured recording. Prior to initiating the interview protocol, the researcher briefly explained the interview scenario, the rationale for the interview, the anticipated duration, and the role of the researcher during the interview. Participant anonymity was granted given the personal nature of the subject matter, and the perceived potential for reprisal. Upon completion of the interviews, the audio recordings were saved and labeled on the researcher's computer for subsequent transfer and analysis. Transcripts of the interviews were created using the company Rev ([www.rev.com](http://www.rev.com)), which will produce a verbatim Microsoft Word document of the interview.

### **Analysis**

Data analysis is the most difficult and most crucial aspect of qualitative research (Dey, 1993). The researcher completed analysis and data coding by hand. Basit (2003) concludes that coding by hand allows the researcher to communicate and connect with

the data to facilitate the comprehension of the emerging phenomena and to generate theory grounded in the data (Basit, 2003). The analysis of qualitative data is a critical step to extracting themes and sub-themes (Miles, 1979). The analysis can be a difficult task because it is not fundamentally a mechanical or technical exercise. It is a dynamic, intuitive and creative process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorizing. Most qualitative researchers analyze their own data to gain a deeper understanding of what they studied and to continually refine their interpretations (Basit, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **Instruments for Data Collection**

To collect data, the researcher used personal interviews. Data collection for grounded theory primarily uses interviews to yield rich data for subsequent analysis, and coding (Fletcher-Watson, 2013). The researcher followed Charmaz's approach to constructivist grounded theory, the interviews for this study were semi-structured and conducted by telephone using open-ended questions and prompts. Charmaz (2014) stated that the selection of data collection tools was driven by the research question. The primary research question for the proposed study explored reasons why pilots were deciding to be retained by the USAF, or separate into civilian life is addressed specifically in the interview questions as shown in Appendix A. Since all participants were from the same culture-sharing group, they were subjected to the same series of interview questions.

The grounded theory approach is the best research methodology for this specific study. Grounded theory seeks to generate or discover a theory and provide a unified theoretical explanation for a process or an action (Strauss & Corbin, 2007). In this case,

the study was grounded in data from participants in the B-2 community who have experienced the plight of service within the sub-culture of Whiteman AFB. Due to the localized nature of the B-2 community, an evidence-based theory was developed suggesting common solutions to pilot retention.

An ethnographic, narrative, or phenomenological research approach would fall short of answering the research question. Ethnography is best used to study members of a culture-sharing group, or individuals representative of the group (Creswell, 2013). This seems to be indicative of the research approach that would be useful if studying pilots and their retention intentions in the USAF. However, ethnography is not the best suited approach for this research study because it seeks to study the meaning of the behavior, language, and interactions amongst members of the culture-sharing group. Likewise, the narrative and phenomenological qualitative approaches attempt to explore the life of an individual, and the essence of an experience, respectively, which lacks the methodological structure necessary to answer the research question.

Researchers begin a grounded theory study by creating broad, open-ended questions to allow stories to emerge and an interview guide with prompts to encourage rich narrative data (Charmaz, 2009). Grounded theory researchers use intensive interviews by asking participants for an in-depth description of the phenomenon, stopping and exploring the topic, requesting more detail or exploration, and asking the participants about their thoughts and feelings about the phenomenon. In keeping with Charmaz's (2014) approach, the researcher developed interview protocols and interview questions titled *Retention Intentions: Deciding the Future of the Force* (Appendix A). In accordance to strict intensive interview protocol, the interviewer explored the depth of a

given answer by asking members to elaborate, clarify, or provide examples (Urquhart, Lehmann, & Myers, 2009). The interview questions were emergent in that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed (Creswell, 2014).

### **The Researcher's Role**

Grounded theory is the qualitative approach taken by this study, and is applied in different ways, objectivist or constructivist, due to the origins of the theory and the disagreement of the founders, Strauss and Glaser, coupled with advances to the research process (Charmaz, 2014). Objectivist grounded theory is the traditional method by which the researcher serves as a neutral, *outside observer*, as opposed to constructivist grounded theory where the researcher interacts with and interprets the data *within* the research (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher's role in constructivist grounded theory is to be directly involved with, interacting with, and interpreting the research (Charmaz, 2014; Sandelowski, Barroso, & Voils, 2007) rather than practicing bracketing as is the norm in traditional grounded theory (Creswell, 2014).

### **Gaining Participants for the Study**

Gaining access to the participants were logistically straightforward. The researcher has personal relationships with each of the participants in the 2006 and 2007-year groups. Furthermore, due to small number of participants in this study, the overall quantity of interviews was relatively small. There are 18 eligible pilots in both year groups. Because this study focuses on a real-world problem that exists in the researcher's place of work, the researcher is personally familiar with the schedule, work demands, and availability of each participant. The minimum number of participants to reach data saturation was determined to be 12 (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2008).

### **Planned Procedures**

The researcher used the following steps for data collection: (a) located participants through personal network of contacts, (b) determined if the potential participants met the inclusion criteria, (c) send via email consent disclosure to participants who meet the criteria, (d) obtained verbal consent to audio record interviews, with verbal disclaimer of personal views vice official views of the USAF, (e) conducted and recorded interviews and documented field notes, (f) used transcription service Rev ([www.rev.com](http://www.rev.com)) to produce Microsoft word documents for the interviews, and (g) conducted content and data analysis (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2014; Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). Each interview lasted between 35 and 60 minutes.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis for this study was conducted by the researcher using both open coding and axial coding (Babbie, 2017). Transcripts from all participants were examined, reflected on, and analyzed for themes pertaining to B-2 pilot retention. The researcher had transcripts created by the online software company Rev ([www.rev.com](http://www.rev.com)), which were presented to the researcher in Microsoft word document format. As recommended by Cutcliffe (2000) the researcher read through each transcript looking for potential errors, while listening to the audio recording playback. As noted by Jeon (2004) initial themes were identified during this step, while also being aware for potential subthemes.

Coding was then completed after numerous transcript read-throughs; where obvious reappearing words and themes were looked for (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). The researcher underlined key words in the margin of the text, then consolidated notes,

messages, and other data in a single notes section at the end of the transcript (Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Coffey & Atkins, 1996). Comparing and contrasting the interviews developed initial themes. This was made easier by following the interview protocol in Appendix A, ensuring all interviews were conducting in the same way, and using the same set of question. For example, if asked to provide three things that could be improved upon to aid in retention, the researcher can simply compare the participant's answers and determine if the respondent gave similar or differing answers.

### **Coding**

In the constructivist grounded theory coding takes place in four stages (a) initial, (b) focused, (c) categories, (d) concepts (Charmaz, 2014). To aid in initial coding the researcher created an excel spreadsheet to input interview results. The results were color coded red meaning bad or negative retention trend, orange meaning maybe, indifferent, or not applicable, or green meaning yes or positive retention indicator. Aligning the participants color-coded answers within the spreadsheet allowed the researcher to develop initial themes and subthemes by comparing participant's answers and identifying emerging data.

Strauss and Corbin (2007), determined the aim of the coding process "is to produce concepts that seem to fit the data" (p. 28). Questions the researcher asked while coding included: (a) what process or action are these data about, (b) how can the process be defined, (c) what are the factors involved in the process development, (d) what is lacking in the data, and (e) when, how, and why this process is necessary (Charmaz, 2014). Moving forward in the coding process to focused coding, the researcher examined and compared the initial codes to determine those that were most important or most

frequent (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher critically analyzed the initial codes to condense several into one, elevated some to higher levels as categories, and discarded others (Charmaz, 2014). The following list provided by Charmaz (2014) helped to determine which codes were elevated to focused codes:

- What do you find when you compare your initial codes with data?
- In which ways might your initial codes reveal patterns?
- Which of these codes best account for the data?
- Have you raised these codes to focused codes?
- What do your comparisons between codes indicate?
- Do your focused codes reveal gaps in the data? (p. 140–141)

Raising focused codes to categories and then to concepts was accomplished through investigating the code frequency and meaning, memo writing, and analyzing excerpts (Charmaz, 2014). Memo writing is a crucial step in grounded theory because it stimulates analysis of codes and data (Charmaz, 2014, Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 2007). Memos were written on the spreadsheet as a method of organization and interpretation. These would later be referenced for reoccurrence and used to inform the recommendations chapter of the study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained prior to data collection, meeting Creighton University's Institutional Review Board policy (Appendix B). As per the approval, no additional oversight was required from the university. The researcher developed participant invitations as Participant Recruitment Email (Appendix C) and informed consent disclosures as Participant Email (Appendix D) to include in the

Institutional Review Board proposal. The informed consent disclosure included the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of the study, the procedures for opting out of the study, and a request for participants to provide feedback on the study's preliminary results. The researcher employed strict data security and verification procedures. When collecting and transcribing data, the researcher took precautions to ensure participant confidentiality including: (a) using fictitious names (Roberts, 2010) for transcripts, (b) refrain from the use of specific company or organization names, and (c) store the study's data on secure, password protected files on a computer, and any paper files in a locked file cabinet with access only to the researcher for three years and three months after the study is closed. Every precaution was taken to ensure the participants' anonymity. The results were shared with the university community through the defense process. Furthermore, the study may be shared externally through a publication in a professional journal, and finally the researcher offered to share the results with the participants via an e-mailed copy of the completed study.

Additional ethical challenges that were faced revolve around the researcher's professional role, which places him very close to the subject matter. The researcher is an active duty B-2 pilot who has experience with the challenges of our service and the flying community. Keeping his own pre-conceived ideas of the problem out of the study is paramount. The raw data emphasized certain elements of the issues that might not have previously discovered in the literature review.

### **Summary**

The USAF needs to aggressively pursue initiatives to fix declining pilot retention. The discussion has moved into criticality and is impacting the service's ability to promise

national defense. Overwhelmingly, the highest priority, and most direct issue for service leaders to face and address are the inherent cultural issues within the armed forces, which is causing people to flee their service in mass (McGee, 2015). This is only underscored by recent research, which shows how critical appreciation in the workplace is to retaining your best workers (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; White, 2015).

The importance of providing change for the common good can be summarized by the Jesuit value of *cura personalis*. Here, individualized attention to the needs of others, with distinct respect for his or her unique circumstances and concerns, and appropriate attention and appreciation for their gifts and insight is paramount (Lowney, 2003). When you are focused on the care of the whole person, you embody the common good. Your efforts are narrowed to what is best for the collect group, thus making sacrifices from personal gain. In many ways, this care is a romantic notion of how our great nation was founded and secured. The founding fathers came together, fought for their beliefs, and although passionate, gave concessions. Their ability to drive change through compromise was successful because in the end it provided stability, prosperity, and provided for the commonwealth.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

**Introduction**

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study was to explore the contributing factors of the pilot retention crisis in the B-2 community of the U.S. Armed Forces. To retain a manageable scope of the study, the researcher sought to answer the following question: Why are B-2 pilots in the USAF opting to leave the service at the expiration of their Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training (SUPT) Active Duty Service Commitment (ADSC)?

At the time of this writing, the researcher had not discovered any other studies that specifically explored the growing pilot retention deficit specifically focused on the B-2 community. Thus, the current study centered on capturing B-2 pilot's self-perceived implications of the growing manning shortfall, and their personal experience related to the research question. Semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions were conducted with 14 eligible study participants to create the data for this chapter.

The aim of this dissertation research was to create an evidenced-based theory that informed current USAF leadership of the contributing factors that most greatly impact retention in the B-2 community. The researcher aspired to use the results of the current study to help shape future policy and alter the current pilot-manning crisis by informing leaders of the factors most directly impacting B-2 pilot retention.

Chapter Four provides the reader an insight into the thoughts of a sample of both current and former B-2 pilots in the FY2006 and FY2007 year groups. First, the reader will be given an overview of the study's participants from a demographic perspective. Next, there will be an exploration of study participants' answers to the interview

protocol, and their understanding of the current state of the retention crisis. The data herein begins to form a basis for understanding the origins behind the retention crisis; how highly educated, highly motivated officers in the USAF, getting an opportunity to fly the most technologically advanced aircraft ever created, could separate in pursuit of quality of life gains. More importantly, insights gained from this research should elucidate approaches that will reduce the retention burden and be of mutual benefit to B-2 pilots and to the organization.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

A total of 14 participant interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed by Rev ([www.rev.com](http://www.rev.com)). Each interview was treated as an individual case, and was hand coded according to a set of themes (i.e., acceptance of the aviation bonus, motivators for staying or leaving the service, idealized improvements for retention, and an assessment of quality of life, culture, financial opportunity, and professional development), and then compared against each other. As the transcriptions were returned to the researcher, each transcript was coded to isolate major themes, which were based on the questions in the interview protocol.

Questions in the interview protocol pointed to specific topics intended to isolate themes that would answer the primary research question: Why are B-2 pilots in the USAF opting to leave the service at the expiration of their Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training (SUPT) Active Duty Service Commitment (ADSC)? To maximize the information gathered by the participants, complete analysis and data coding was conducted by hand. Basit (2003) concludes that coding by hand allows the researcher to communicate and connect with the data to facilitate the comprehension of the emerging

phenomena and to generate theory grounded in the data (Basit, 2003). The analysis of qualitative data is a critical step to extracting themes and sub-themes (Miles, 1979). The point of analysis is to find “patterns, insights, or concepts that seem promising” (Yin, 2014, p. 162). Coding provided a structured manner to engage the analytic process. The analysis can be a difficult task because it is not fundamentally a mechanical or technical exercise. It is a dynamic, intuitive and creative process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorizing. Most qualitative researchers analyze their own data to gain a deeper understanding of what they studied and to continually refine their interpretations (Basit, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **Who Were the Participants?**

Eligible study participants were B-2 pilots in the FY2006 and FY2007 year groups. Each year group had nine eligible participants, totaling 18 possible participants. The researcher deduced that 12 interviews was the minimum in order to reach data saturation (Guest, et al., 2008). The researcher contacted 100% of the eligible participants through email and received voluntary permission to arrange an interview from 17 of the 18. Of the 14 participants, seven were members of the FY2006 group, and seven were members of the FY2007 group. Three participants who volunteered to participate were never interviewed; one is deployed to an undisclosed location and was unavailable during reasonable hours, and the remaining two participants were unable to deconflict work schedules during three different attempts to conduct the interview. All participants were men, as no women are currently serving in the FY2006 or FY2007 groups in the B-2. Of the 14 participants a majority remain on active duty. Four

participants have already left active duty (29%), and 10 are still currently serving in active duty (71%).

### **Theme One: Deployments**

The constant awareness of, and perceived fear of a 365-day deployment emerged as a very common theme among all participants. Only 3 of the 14 participants (29%) did not cite deployments as a nearly top reason for electing to refuse the ARP and leave the service. Equivalently, 71% of the respondents named deployments, and specifically a 365-day deployment, as the number one reason why they would not be retained by the USAF. The top three themes also appear to be fundamentally linked. The fear of deploying for an entire year directly correlates to time away from family, eroding quality of life (QOL). Additionally, the anticipation of the deployment cycle, timeline, duration, location, and job offer little predictability. These factors combined underscore the participant's declaration of QOL as a primary negative influencing retention factor.

Participants indicated their awareness of, and affirmed their commitment to, the USAF's mission and role within the DoD. They understand that deployments are a necessary and important aspect of military life. However, they emphasized that nearly all 365-day deployments were not directly related to the B-2 or the B-2's mission of global strike, or conventional and nuclear deterrence. This lack of mission focus, coupled with non-flying related duties act as a negative retention indicator. Specifically, James elaborated on this subject by saying:

That doesn't meet the intent of what pilots are supposed to do in the Air Force.

When I look at a B-2 guy, his job is to go down range and be established in AOR, his job is to serve as a B-2 pilot or a mission planner from either home station or

one of the couple deploy bases. So [with deployment] time under his belt it's kind of against our tactics to use him in down range billet like that. So then putting him in the same pod as somebody else who has a more deployable job, per se, while it may seem fair on paper it doesn't make sense why that person is trained and has had millions of dollars poured into them for that training.

Additionally, Richard shared his thoughts on this same subject:

I think from a business standpoint; the Air Force needs to get over this [the idea that] everybody is just as important as everybody else. I get it, everybody's important. But when you have four million dollars of training invested into one person, I think it's okay to maybe put a little more steam into trying to retain them, verses someone who maybe has like a hundred thousand dollars invested into them. Seeing how it works in a corporate environment, that's how it works. And they're very upfront about it and it's understood on all levels. Everybody's okay with it.

For some reason, the Air Force is very adverse to it. It's like they don't want to hurt people's feelings by trying to work with groups of people that they really need more than other groups of people. Working with them more than other people.

A number of participants called for the elimination of 365-day deployments altogether, calling them “toxic” to retention and the ability to accomplish the mission. Due to the B-2’s unique mission and low observable technological advantage, it rarely participates in ongoing combat operations around the world. Instead, it has assumed a “deployed in garrison” role that accentuates its strategic deterrence mission. This

mission set is unique in two major ways. First, the B-2 executes global strike from Whiteman AFB exclusively; meaning the jets launch and recover from and to Missouri. Such operations were highlighted in January 2017 when two B-2s executed operation ODYSSEY LIGHTNING. This operation was a 33-hour mission launched from, and recovered to Whiteman AFB, killing 78 Islamic State terrorists (Martinez & Meek, 2017). Despite the deployed combat nature of the mission, the flight was limited to four personnel, and does not constitute a *deployment*. Thus, despite participation in combat operations B-2 aircrew are not given deployment credit for accomplishing their in-garrison mission.

Secondly, the aircraft and thus the aircrew rarely land anywhere other than Whiteman AFB. Strategic deterrence missions are conducted from isolated forward operating locations as well as from Whiteman AFB on a limited basis. Moreover, the B-2's nuclear mission holds the aircraft and crews close to the base. A number of training exercises occur throughout the year to practice the safe, secure, and effective handling of the nuclear stockpile ([www.whiteman.af.mil](http://www.whiteman.af.mil)). These exercises emphasize the global strike capability of the B-2 by projecting airpower from the center of the United States. While this is a different role than a traditional deployment, it is effective in deterring the nation's enemies (Geller, 1990). Despite all of the deployment-like operations, the B-2 community does not receive any deployment credit for these activities.

James emphasized these points during his interview. His opinion towards deployments highlighted the "deployed in garrison" mindset:

So again, they're complaining about a pilot shortage and then they're trying to deploy dudes to non-flying billets that also in my case aren't [weapons officer]

billets and aren't meeting the intent of the reason I'm in the Air Force, right now, or my needs in general. So, it's not that serious of a threat of a 365 [day deployment] or [another] deployment is that high, it's just that the risk outweighs the reward. Bottom line, I am not against deploying if it is for the B-2 or to actually use the Air Force's time and effort. Not so much for other stuff that seems like it could be handled either, not at all or, by somebody of a lesser qualification.

### **Theme Two: Family**

It was clear while analyzing the data that family time was directly tied to quality of life for each participant. Fully 100% of the participants are married with children. Many of them began their Air Force career outside of married life, and were stationed at another base, flying another aircraft. It was noted by numerous participants that family life in the B-2 greatly exceed the family QOL experienced in their previous aircraft. For example, Robert said this:

I got my wings in 2007, and when I was winged [I] hit the ground running in [my] first operational assignment. Man, it was right to the wolves. Global war on terrorism was full force. I was flying DC-10s from 2008 to 2011 when I transferred to [the] B-2, but in those years, I can say that my perception of the Air Force went from very excited young lieutenant to just slowly starting to [get burnt out]. I did six deployments over the course of about four years. Those deployment durations were anywhere from 60 to almost 90 days [over] a total of six deployments.

For nearly all of the participants the biggest concern was the issue of being confronted with a deployment and having to leave their family for six to twelve months.

Many struggled to balance and justify their obligation to serve, while still attempting to preserve family normalcy. In fact, for John the decision between deploying and leaving his family is a deal breaker. He elaborated on this by saying:

I have not accepted [the ARP] and I don't intend to, but can I answer it this way? If I were staying in, I would still not accept it, and the reason, like a lot of people have probably said, it is not life-changing money, but it is life-changing commitment. So you just signed five more years of your life where you have no option. If you get an assignment that's not good for your family, or if you get a 365 [day deployment], you now can't say no to it for \$25,000 a year. Not worth it.

Joseph also had a strong opinion on deployments and family life. He commented:

And the only negative aspect that I've seen, and that's a common trait between everybody, not everybody, but people that are getting out, is the fact that they don't want to have to accept a 365 [day deployment], or even a 179 [day deployment] that's going to take them away from their family.

Related to the comfort of extended family nearby, participants were steadfast with the desire to move less often. Although this contrasts against USAF policy norms, 36% of the participants indicated an interest in staying in one location for an extended period of time – a process called *homesteading* (Barry, 2018). There are core family benefits to such stability, including school continuity, spouse careers, friendships, churches, etc. Additionally, for Daniel staying in Missouri is a family priority. He and his wife's family live nearby. This directly contributes to a positive family QOL, and thus is a positive retention indicator if they were able to move less, and stay near family. Daniel expounded on this by saying:

Yeah, obviously, like I mentioned, staying local, not deploying, were huge factors. I realized I wanted to shut the doors on moving or just [have] a little more stability at home. Then, not only just the potential [moving] and stability [concerns]. It was just the uncertainty like, if you stay 20 years, you're going to deploy probably one year, maybe a six month [deployment] in addition. You're going to move every two years. So, not necessarily just moving but just the frequency. Hey I'm going to move in a year or two. I not sure maybe where it's going to be or what it's going to do.

### **Theme Three: Predictability**

The military lifestyle can bring inherent instability. In addition to the previous discussion on unpredictable deployments and family life, daily predictability heavily influenced the study participants. Specifically, the participants highlighted a definitive lack of career predictability that makes members cautious, pessimistic, and guarded from potential career paths. This was underscored during numerous interviews, but most poignantly in Michael's interview. He explained the lack of predictability this way:

I think locally, predictability is a big thing for folks, so just making their schedules as predictable as possible. Limiting deployments, showing that folks at Whiteman will be protected as much as possible from the deployments, especially with the deployed-in-place type job that the B-2 has. One with nuclear deterrence, and two with global strike, both of those require people's availability here at Whiteman to go and execute a global strike mission at a moment's notice, and two that nuclear deterrence which happens every day, whether you're tasked specifically or not. So keeping folks here for deployments, trying to make

schedules as predictable as possible from a flying perspective. Not as much back and forth, not as much unpredictability, I think, is something that I've definitely heard from folks being an issue.

Career progression inside the military is generally predictable. In fact, Matthew asserted that promotion predictability was both a benefit and a fallacy of the military service. He cited that a time-based promotion system guaranteed predictability, while also shattering aspirations of a meritocracy. He quotes:

You know what to expect. I think in some senses this could be a negative...I mean, what I'm about to say could be a negative. And that is that you can, with pretty high accuracy, forecast when you're going to be promoted and when you're going to get a raise. So, [my wife and I] can look two, three years into our future. And there's a chance that somebody might get promoted early, but, even if you just assume you're going to be promoted on time, for the most part, statistically, you're going to be right. So, you're able to forecast your income and what your benefits are going to be, fairly far out. Job security is very good.

Others have long commented on the idealistic view of a time-based promotion system that stems from the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA). DOPMA establishes stable and predictable career paths, institutionalized relatively short careers to private industry, and mandated the military adopt an "up or out" personnel management strategy (Kane, 2012). This indeed adds predictability to career progression, but removes the opportunity for accelerated and motivated officers to ascend quickly based on their personal motivation. This stifles confidence in the system that opts to promote people based on time versus ability, or quality of work.

Predictability goes beyond the careerist's promotion incentives, and permeates daily operational life. Participants consistently argued for a more predictable daily life, ranging from daily flying operations to upcoming temporary duty assignments (TDY). It was reinforced that the B-2 community's predictability overall exceeded that of other platforms within the USAF, however, participants refused to justify a "better" level of predictability that was still overall poor compared to civilian counterparts. Most notably participants complained of a high operations tempo which drives their daily schedule. Operations tempo is an indicator of how busy pilots will be on a day-to-day basis. An increase in annual flying hours is seen as an overall benefit for pilot training, however it also increases operations tempo and leads to less free time for pilots to accomplish other non-flying related mandatory duties. William commented on ops tempo:

I think, for sure the way that we manage our ops is broken. The flying hour program, I was just telling someone yesterday, if I hear someone say, someone in group leadership, whether it be officer commander, or maintenance group commander that, "Well, we [have to] do that because of the flying hour program", I swear to God, I'm going to lose it. We don't have a standard flying schedule at Whiteman, that's insane to me. And it's just because no one wants to throw the resources at solving it. Solving that problem, and telling someone they can't do things the way they've always done them.

Christopher also added this to the ops tempo conversation:

They can also slow down the actual ops tempo of the B-2 guys, so on a day-to-day basis, we're not TDY as much as the rest of the Air Force, but looking at the high level of stress that's involved with nuclear ops, conventional ops, and the

amount of work that we have for the small number of people that we have, I think that weighs significantly on a tour three to four, five years here. That's challenging.

#### **Theme Four: Flexibility**

In order to fill the 365-day deployment Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) will burn through 3-10 people before someone accepts that deployment. Due to the seven-day option policy, which allows a pilot to turn down an assignment and immediately retire or separate, the USAF is sieving pilots from retention goals. In essence, the USAF is willing to lose 3-10 pilots for every 365-day deployment that is required to fill. That is an enormous bill to pay for a single deployment, especially when the service is actively trying to retain pilots. This policy-based lack of flexibility is crippling to manning, and thus directly impacting retention.

Participants commented often on the service's lack of flexibility. Many of the pilots wish the service was more flexible with career progression, assignments, and opportunities. The lack of flexibility, especially after signing the pilot bonus, leaves many of the participants feeling anxious about their future. Christopher was outspoken on this issue:

I think Whiteman's unique, and you want to focus on the B-2 community. I don't think there's a pilot that came here not planning on doing 20 years or more. So, when you have the disproportionate number in some of our year groups leaving, you have to ask yourself kind of why that might be. What's the root cause of anywhere from 12 to 15 people in year groups leaving, so up to 80% of some year groups leaving. I think for our family, right now, wow, it would take ... kind of

the things I was promised when I came in the service, I [found] really, really good people to work with, and I think we have that here at Whiteman, and I think that in a large part in the Air Force, I've really been pleased with the people I've been around. [Many of them] fit the part, but I think you have to have predictability for some [folks] in terms of my family, I would like to know what a three, six, nine, even twelve-year plan looks like. Something that I can [plan on], it doesn't have to be written in stone, but something that gives me some flexibility in planning on what we're going to do.

A very dominant subtheme from the interviews was related to the inflexibility towards new professional opportunities and promotion. A number of participants outlined their discontent with the professional services, tracks, processes, and opportunities afforded to members of the service. This subject was clearly of interest to many of the participants, and logically so. The profession of arms is one that many take very seriously. A discussion of how the promotion system works appears to highlight an area of restlessness. Matthew explained his attitude towards promotions this way:

There are many authorities that the individual services have in terms of evaluation and promotion that do not require any kind of change in law, but have simply not been implemented. For example, I've come to believe that lumping all, quote, "Line of the Air Force officers" into one promotion board is a terrible idea. Nobody understands what everybody does. And so we find ourselves in an evaluation system year by year that we write to cater to a broad audience that really doesn't understand what it is that the flying community does.

I think that the same complaint could be raised by a number of different communities. Maintenance, for example. It's not unique to the pilot community. So, I think that the Air Force at Headquarters level has the power to break promotion boards into a more granular set of airmen that would be more appropriate. It would just generally reduce frustration with the evaluation system, and therefore the promotion system.

### **Theme Five: Financial Compensation**

The unprecedented hiring of military pilots by the commercial airlines is a powerful influence. Despite this steadfast draw, the USAF needs to amend its policies pertaining to pilot pay. Frustrations by nearly all participants show that financial incentives would heavily influence their decision to stay. They see this in two key areas, which the USAF is already actively engaged, the Aviators Retention Pay (pilot bonus) and Aviators Pay (monthly flight pay bonus). Broadly, participants want to see a large increase to both specialized pays. Participants cited \$50,000 - \$100,000 as a starting annual bonus. The current maximum ARP bonus for bomber pilots is only \$30,000 annually for 1, 2, 5, or 9-year agreements (Copp, 2017). This is not a sufficient bonus to attract pilots away from their family, or a potentially lucrative career in the airlines.

Charles had this to say about the bonus:

Big Air Force, people say it's not about the money but a lot of it is about the money. I mean \$30,000 is not enough to keep pilots around. \$35,000 isn't enough to keep pilots around. There is a number that would keep a lot more pilots around in the Air Force if they would just pay that number. A lot of the reasons people get out is the financial gain they get from flying for the airlines. And the earlier

you start your career the more financial gains you have down the road, if the Air Force would offset that with a bigger bonus more people would stay. It is simple math. They can't keep saying it's not about the money and keep giving pilots pretty much a slap in the face when they increase the bonus by five grand. Or increase the aviation pay by 50 bucks, which is what we got last time.

Big Air Force has to take some financial reasonability and pay pilots like the professionally trained people that they are just like they pay doctors and dentists a professional bonus they need to give pilots more money. And I think there's multiple ways to do that but that's big Air Force's responsibility.

Equally important and related to participants desire for predictability in family life, is the rewards that higher pay brings. Participants overwhelmingly ranked quality of life (QOL) as the primary positive retention indicator but expressed that the USAF was not fostering a positive environment conducive to an overall positive QOL. This could be overlooked, according to the participants, if the financial compensation was high enough for the sacrifice to be justified. Some participants answered that the pay was fair but caveated that given the amount of hours they work per week in non-flying related duties, the amount per hour was significantly less than most jobs requiring extreme training, education, and millions of dollars of training. David stated this during his interview:

I don't really care about the money. Money's obviously good, and it can help compensate for that crappy quality of life. Whether it's allowing you to be able to hire a maid for the time that you are at home, you don't have to worry about cleaning the house, or doing laundry or whatever. It's childcare, etc. But, if they

would just straighten out the quality of life piece, give a steadier schedule where you can, kind of, work your life around.

The participants made it clear that they were aware of the financial gains attributed to a commercial airline career. Many of them cited that patriotism, personal motivation, a desire to serve, or do something greater than themselves was a key motivator for commissioning in the service. They understood the pros and cons of service life before they joined. They each expressed their desire to serve, fly exciting aircraft, and develop professional relationships. Interestingly, many of the participant's perspective on their service began to dwindle the longer they remained on active duty. Responses indicate that an erosion of the Air Force's pilot culture, a better understanding of the convoluted promotion system, and a "do more with less" philosophy that took pilots out of the cockpit and placed them non-flying related duties were the culprit. Despite these negative factors, participants would continue to serve if they were compensated higher to reflect the amount of responsibility, hours worked per week, and overall demand on their family. William said it this way:

If they came in and said, "I'll give you a bonus of \$75,000 to \$100,000", and now I no longer feel like I'm putting my family at financial risk by not going to the airlines, at this point in my career, I feel like I can still provide my kids a good education, and I can give them what I could otherwise, give them. I could establish a retirement that would actually give us a lifestyle that we're interested in. If I knew I could make lieutenant colonel, without having to stare down a 365 [day deployment], if I knew I didn't have to do every school in correspondence, before I had the opportunity to go in residence. And I knew that I had a little bit

more stability, and I could say to the Air Force, "This is what I would like to do, this is where I'd like to keep my family, and if you'd let me serve the remainder of my career, either doing this, or at this location as lieutenant colonel, and pay me that amount of money, and I didn't have to do it 365", I would definitely do it.

### **Analysis and Synthesis of Findings**

The researcher sought to answer the following question: Why are B-2 pilots in the USAF opting to leave the service at the expiration of their pilot training contract? The qualitative results of this study concluded that pilots justified their departure based on a negative perception of the following areas: (1) deployments, (2) family, (3) predictability, (4) flexibility, and (5) financial compensation.

The interviews were telling of the current retention environment that exists in the B-2 community. Overall, the 14 participants continue to hold a positive view of the USAF, and their dedicated service to the nation. Only 2 of the 14 (14%) cited a "worse" overall opinion of the service now, versus when they first entered. Collectively, the participants cited training, job satisfaction, benefits (i.e., medical, pay, and access to base facilities, etc.), camaraderie, and unique job opportunities as positive retention influencers. However, despite the positive overall impression of the service, and a number of positive retention influencers, only one (7%) answered that they were planning on accepting the ARP, and continue service in the USAF active duty. Zero participants from the FY2007 answered affirmatively to taking the bonus, and only one participant from the FY2006 answered "yes" to planning on taking the bonus when eligible. Furthermore, the data analysis revealed five major emergent themes that were directly tied to (1) deployments, (2) family, (3) predictability, (4) flexibility, and (5) financial

compensation. Whereas not all inclusive, the five major themes were typically reoccurring and are indicative of trends that exist within the community. Lastly, the participants were asked to rank the following factors in order from most important to least important: (1) quality of life (QOL), (2) cultural, (3) financial, and (4) professional. Overwhelmingly they ranked QOL as the number one most influencing factor to positive retention. Subsequent rankings were cultural, professional, and financial, respectively.

In conversation with the two participants in the FY2006 year group who are decidedly staying in the USAF, there are a few common factors. They are both high performing officers who are quoted as saying that they received important mentoring throughout their career, were given career predictability, and were afforded quality time with their family. Specifically, Matthew says:

I would just add that I think that I've taken it for granted until very recently. But, one of the things I said the Air Force could do better was provide a path for people. And I have been told that I have been on a path for several years. I've had consistent mentoring, and I've had the most predictability that the Air Force can reasonably provide me in terms of what's coming next. So, I understand that they can't give me a 100%, here's exactly what your next five years looks like. But, I've become convinced that my immediate leadership has given me the best assessment for what my future looks like, that they can. So, that has been a big deal to me and to my family. So, continuing to do that is something that they could do to retain me.

This reinforces what the other participants are saying about negative retention. If given predictability and consistent mentoring it is clear that positive retention can be an outcome.

The identified themes of this study echo similar concerns from pilots throughout the USAF. Air Force leadership understands that pilots are leaving due to a plethora of factors. Secretary of the Air Force Dr. Heather Wilson points to the following as key evidence for poor retention, “Long and too frequent combat deployments, inadequate pay and benefits, and the associated temptation for military pilots to take better-paying airline jobs” (as cited in Axe, 2018, p. 2). Despite leadership’s apparent awareness of the problem, pilots perceive that little is being done to remedy the situation fast enough to matter.

### **Summary**

The ability of organizations to retain highly skilled employees is as important today as it has ever been. Maintaining human capital keeps the organization economically successful and viable in an ever-changing world (Kyndt, Dochy, Michielsens, & Moeyaert, 2009). This fact of organizational life is true even in the military realm, where the United States Air Force is facing its own retention problem. An uneasiness has crept into the B-2 pilot culture. The researcher identified five major themes from 14 total qualitative interviews that were conducted in April and May 2018. The five themes are (1) deployments, (2) family, (3) predictability, (4) flexibility, and (5) financial compensation. Centrally these themes are linked together to provide a higher quality of life for the service member and their family. B-2 pilots are fearful of unpredictable 365-day deployments that would take them away from their families for

significant periods of time. One officer put it this way, “I would rather run out of career than run out of family” (Stark, 2018, p. 1). This is indicative of the problems faced by the B-2 community, and the United States Air Force. Pilots refuse to place the needs of the service over the needs of their family when confronted with the choice, and when afforded an abundant opportunity in the civilian market.

## FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Introduction**

To answer the central question of this grounded theory study, why are B-2 pilots opting to leave the service at the expiration of their service commitment, the researcher gathered insight from 14 B-2 pilots in the FY2006 and FY2007 year groups. These interviews provided insights about the positive and negative retention indicators experienced by each pilot throughout their career, and specifically their career as a B-2 pilot. Research participants acknowledged the challenge of retaining pilots in the shadow of a major airline hiring boom but emphasized that the USAF's culture is ultimately responsible for declining retention. Notably, these individuals expressed their distrust in deployments taking them away from their families, creating large periods of unpredictability and emotional strain. Securing retention for the USAF is a career long process wherein the participants feel valued, perform their core mission, are respected for their contributions, and are able to provide a high quality of life for their family.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study was to explore the contributing factors of the pilot retention crisis in the B-2 community of the U.S. Armed Forces. The researcher sought to answer the following question: Why are B-2 pilots in the USAF opting to leave the service at the expiration of their Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training (SUPT) Active Duty Service Commitment (ADSC)?

### **Aim of the Study**

The aim of this dissertation research was to create an evidenced-based theory that informed current USAF leadership of the contributing factors that most greatly impact

retention in the B-2 community. The research results aspire to help shape future policy and alter the current pilot-manning crisis by informing leaders of the factors most directly impacting B-2 pilot retention.

### **Conclusion**

B-2 pilots are leaving the USAF at the expiration of their UPT ADSC because of a perceived lack of leadership from the 509<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing regarding pilot quality of life, work-culture, professional development and wellbeing, and low financial compensation. In the wake of the research results the question still exists, what can localized B-2 leadership do to impact the severely declining B-2 pilot retention issue? The current study was not intended to be an indictment of former, current, or future leadership, but rather to serve as an evidence-based source of true and current data regarding the viewpoints of current B-2 pilots. This study also was not designed to solve, or inform the national pilot retention dilemma, or act as a historic look back at where we have been, but rather where are we going. The recommendations contained within Chapter 5 offer a way forward at nearly all levels of the B-2 command structure from headquarters Air Force (HAF), Air Force Global Strike Command, 509<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing, and the 509<sup>th</sup> Operations Group.

There is clearly room for retention improvement. The USAF strives to retain 67% of its pilots at the expiration of their UPT ADSC (Mattock et al., 2016). Currently, the 2006-year group will retain 2 of 9 (22%) for future leadership opportunities, staff billet fulfillment, and return-to-cockpit options; and only 1 out of 7 interviewed in the 2007-year group indicated that they would *consider* signing the bonus (7%). This should be cause for serious alarm for both local B-2 leaders and those up the echelon. Due to the

small fleet and small group dynamics created by a sole base platform, the B-2 may not require a 67% retention rate. However, the bleak retention rates should be viewed as a statement directed at Air Force leadership, and participants want to know “is anyone listening?”

Nearly all participants indicated that leaders at all levels failed to communicate effectively regarding career paths, deployments, and retention policies. Specifically, in the wake of the national Air Force pilot retention crisis, no one seems to be actively attempting to retain the participants. A limited number of retention conversations were held with leadership, but participants are unsure of the outcomes from those discussions. They were asked similar questions in face-to-face meetings, in online surveys, and informally at other times. It is clear that the problems have been plainly identified, a path to retention has been expressed, yet no discussion on pending fixes have occurred – so pilots are leaving. Their perception is that no one is listening, and nothing is changing. Overall, these pilots viewed retention as a strong possibility, and a primary desire in their early career, only developing a negative view of retention near the expiration of their pilot training ADSC. This chapter discusses the conclusions reached in the study, the implications of those conclusions for B-2 pilots, and identifies areas for future research. The USAF has a storied past of pilots communicating their disdain for organizational policy through a process known as “dear boss letters.” The recurrence of poor leadership communication has reappeared throughout the literature review for this project, and continued through the interview process. An evident disconnect is present between service leadership and the tactical operator. So much so that in the trough of a full-on manning crisis, then Air Force Chief of Staff General Mark Welsh testified to Congress

that, “morale is pretty darn good” (Carr, 2016). While the retention crisis continued to deepen and broaden across aircraft platforms, the executive leadership remained oblivious to the pending catastrophe. Although this study is not intended to analyze how the retention problem originated, it can draw parallels, observe similarities, and isolate behavior that will continue to drive retention further into despair if not corrected.

### **Summary of the Findings**

Data analysis reveals five major themes within this research area (1) deployments, (2) family, (3) predictability, (4) flexibility, and (5) financial compensation. It was revealed that leadership at all levels ranging from HAF, all the way down to the Group, have unambiguous responsibilities and corrective measures to address. The five identified themes represent the specific and immediate concerns for the pilots interviewed. The themes represent the reasons why retention will be difficult for nearly all of the FY2006 and FY2007 year groups. However, the actions that the USAF needs to focus on are quality of life, cultural, professional, and financial. These conclusions help outline an evidence-based roadmap for B-2 leadership to follow to reverse the current retention decline.

### **Quality of Life**

Participants have been told by leadership that pilots at Whiteman Air Force Base have a better quality of life than most of their rated counterparts in the service branches. Simply put, leadership refuses to acknowledge the QOL concerns B-2 pilots have while performing a “deployed in garrison” mission. This does not absolve leadership from reflecting on policies, operations tempo, mentoring, flexibility, and then seeking improvements to aid in retention. Participants want to spend more time at home with

their families, requiring leadership to prioritize operations tempo, carefully examine participation in exercises and events that place strain on the already limited resources and manning, and reduce the non-flying burden on highly trained technical experts that pilots represent. This includes reducing 365-day deployments for non-B-2 related tasks, and improving predictability across all facets of life (daily schedules, TDYs, deployments, career, etc.).

### **Cultural**

The ongoing cultural issues within the USAF are seen daily, and can be found in everyday work events (Losey, 2017). These things are minor overall, but when added together become a large factor in people's desire to continue within the service. The cultural identity of the service needs to be reexamined and improvements made in order to increase retain ability. Productive and satisfied employees start with providing an environment that is conducive to the job at hand (Sminchise, 2016). The origin of the cultural erosion in the USAF is not being debated. Pilots want their computers to work, the mandatory internet-oriented programs to operate consistently, and traditions restored. They want to see a culture where pilots are respected for their contribution at the leading edge of the airpower fight. This should include an immediate stop to "pilot shaming" as a mechanism to marginalize pilots' status within the force, and create a culture of conformity and normalization amongst its warrior class. Charles specifically mentioned this during his interview:

One of the biggest problems, I think why people get unhappy is because, people don't get recognized for all the work they did, especially pilots. That's just a slap in the face to the entire pilot community. And I know it's a trend in the Air Force

to make maintenance personnel and finance officers and security forces officers feel like they are more part of the team and put them at the top of the list so they can feel...I don't even know what the logic is. But the bottom line is they're not going to run the Air Force. They're not going to carry on wars, they're support personnel, and you need to give proper recognition to the people who are actually doing the job of the Air Force, which is pilots.

Charles' statement is a calling to develop a culture that conveys value and appreciation regularly, in a language that is important to the recipient, individualized, and is authentic (White, 2016a), prioritizing the individuals whom are most critical to the mission, and thus retention.

### **Financial**

Without qualification, these themes are indicative of research done pertaining to retention, which cites financial factors, pay and benefits, and a mismatch between individual interest and job assignment (Sminchise, 2016) as influencing considerations. There is no surprise that financial concerns came up in all participant interviews. With the commercial airline hiring surge in full effect, pilots in the USAF are naturally lured away from a modestly paying military career. The airlines can offer financial compensation that the government cannot, and in many cases the increase in pay is hundreds of thousands of dollars (Hodges, 2016). The USAF has a process to financially incentivize career fields that are highly desired in the civilian market. Naturally, the service has to compete for highly sought-after individuals that meet a specific educational, technical, and experience threshold such as doctors, dentists...and pilots. Bonuses for certain medical professionals in the USAF exceed \$100,000 annually

(DFAS, 2016). This is more than triple the current bomber pilot bonus (Copp, 2017). Many of the participants are aware of these bonuses, and David commented in this interview about it:

I would imagine it to be something similar to what the doctors and surgeons and everybody else gets as far as compensation. You know, they take a look at what they get in the outside world, and make it competitive. I do think that raising your flight pay by \$50 a month is insulting, when you start looking at what guys [are making] as airline pilots and such.

If retention of highly educated, highly trained, highly experienced, competent leaders is the goal of the USAF, they should continue to ask Congress for increased financial compensation to aid in pilot retention.

### **Professional**

Finally, from a professional standpoint, the USAF could do more to value their pilots, and place them at the rightful status within the organization. The aviators represent a highly educated, highly motivated, highly skilled demographic within the service, yet the USAF treats them professionally the same as other specialty codes. This does not match the level of effort, motivation, mission importance, and overall training cost when valuing a pilot over another officer's "worth." This concept was visited when addressing the cultural concerns because the two are complimentary. The culture of the service has to value its warrior class - its operators.

For many participants, professional improvements include career flexibility and predictability. Specifically, 75% of the participants asked for improved communication regarding their career path improving flexibility and predictability. Moreover,

participants want a career roadmap drawn out for them as early as possible to help them understand how they fit into the organization, and where they fit for future positions. This roadmap would be individualized, and nearly impossible to be 100% accurate, but would at least provide a starting point for pilots to deviate from. Charles is one who specifically asked for more predictability and flexibility:

If the Air Force would have told me exactly what I was going to do for the next five years...or if I had the opportunity to negotiate what I wanted to do...then I would have stayed. And if they had given me an opt-out clause. So, if they have promised me all these things and I signed the bonus and have five years and they changed their mind and do something else with me...I can opt out. You broke your contract so I don't have to stick with that contract either.

### **Proposed Solution**

The current study was not intended to be an indictment of former, current, or future leadership, but rather to serve as an evidence-based source of true and current data regarding the viewpoints of current B-2 pilots. This study also was not designed to solve, or inform the national pilot retention dilemma, or act as a historic look at where we have been, but rather where are we going. The proposed solutions offer a way forward at nearly all levels of the B-2 specific command structure focusing on the 509<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing and the 509<sup>th</sup> Operations Group. Positive retention policies at HAF and MAJCOM are forthcoming on the national stage.

It is unfair to place the financial compensation burden on anyone other than the Air Force Chief of Staff and the Secretary of the Air Force. They have limited power to directly increase the bonus, or the monthly flight pay. They are responsible for, and

should continue to advocate for such increases to Congress. They must make a timely and compelling argument for increases across the board to pilot pay. They must continue to make changes to the QOL, cultural and professional areas within the Air Force.

Ultimately, the responsibility rests on their shoulders. Progress is being made, and many believe that real and lasting changes are forthcoming (Losey, 2018a; Losey, 2018c; McCullough, 2018; Woody, 2018). However, this study aimed to inform B-2 leadership on the factors influencing retention at the local level and offer solutions to improve current declining retention rates.

### **509<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing and 509<sup>th</sup> Operations Group**

The grounded theoretical solution to the decreasing retention in the B-2 pilot community is a renewed focus on pilot welfare from 509<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing leadership. During the coding process focused areas of interest were isolated to help inform recommendations and solutions. Due to the tiered organizational structure of the Air Force, the Operations Group is a subordinate tier to the Wing. The 509<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing is responsible for 100% of B-2 pilots in Air Force Global Strike Command, and thus the solutions are directed at the leaders of these organizations. Together with the subordinate groups, the Wing Commander is responsible for the training, equipping and organizing of the B-2 pilot fleet, including personnel.

The 509<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing commander is a 1-star general that holds significant influence within the organization. It is well within their ability to impact retention by specifically improving QOL, cultural, and professional issues. An increase in devotion and dedicated leadership focus on B-2 pilots will make them feel heard, valued, and appreciated (Chapman & White, 2011; Fagley & Adler, 2012; Robbins, 2000; White,

2014a) directly influencing their decision to stay in the service. To reverse the negative retention trend leadership should examine the following recommendations, listed below in priority order:

1. Recall all pilot 365-day deployments not directly related to the B-2's flying mission (QOL, cultural, financial, and professional)
2. Advocate for manning adjustments from HAF (QOL)
3. Say "no" more and decrease the operations tempo (QOL)
4. Reduce non-flying duties (tours, simulators, distinguished visitor escort), give more dedicated studying, training, and core-responsibility time (QOL, cultural)
5. Appreciate and value pilots more – eliminate pilot "shaming" (cultural, professional)
6. Stratify pilots at the tip of the spear (professional)
7. Listen to pilots about their concerns (QOL, cultural)
8. Communicate more about the status of their concerns (QOL, cultural)
9. Provide a career roadmap (professional)
10. Hold support agencies accountable and responsible for their contribution to the overall mission (QOL, cultural)

Strategic leadership influences excellent internal public relations by establishing the link between authentic leadership, symmetrical and transparent communication, and employee-organization relationships. The result showed that authentic leadership as a precursor factor plays a critical role in nurturing an organization's symmetrical and transparent communication system, which in turn, cultivates quality employee-organization relationships (Men & Stacks, 2014). As such, the ultimate recommendation

of this study is that a renewed leadership mindset focusing on specific elements that resonate with B-2 pilots is adapted. Based on the current evidence-based study, it is the view of the researcher that if the USAF is to achieve retention homeostasis the mnemonic  $A^3BC^2$  will seek to answer the leadership underperformances leading to the current retention decline. Leadership should *advocate*, and *authentically appreciate* ( $A^3$ ) B-2 pilots for their critical role in national defense and life-threatening contribution to the strategic deterrence mission (Chapman & White, 2011; Fagley & Adler, 2012; Men & Stacks, 2014; Robbins, 2000; White, 2014a). Applying authentic leadership to a volatile situation that makes talented workers feel valued is a critical step towards job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959; Men & Stacks, 2014; Putra et al., 2015). This will directly answer pilot's concerns about feeling valued and will seek to elevate their status amongst their peers. This is not designed to lessen the contribution of others, but rather is a retention tool for leaders to use to capitalize on a most important asset.

Leaders should seek *bonuses* (B) as a mechanism to financially compensate pilots higher, and commensurate with their effort, responsibility, and to counterbalance the current boom in airline hiring (Farrier, 2016; Hodges, 2015; Ostrower, 2017; Sminchise, 2016). Although the responsibility for increasing financial compensate is held at Headquarters USAF, leadership at lower levels should be doing everything within their power to adjudicate the disproportionate pay rate between military pilots and airline pilots.

Finally, leadership must *communicate* about *careers* ( $C^2$ ) in a way that is informative to the member about where their service path is taking them. Establishing expectations is not only a reasonable request, but a hallmark quality of ethically salient

leadership (Grojean, Resick, Dickson & Smith, 2004). Overwhelmingly, participants in this study sought feedback regarding their performance and their path forward. Many of them joined the service with the intention of serving past their initial commitment. Since the initial commitment offered stability and a relatively clear path forward for ten years it is not unreasonable for pilots who are investigating their future to ask questions.

Leadership should acquiesce this request for predictability by offering a career roadmap providing the most likely way forward with some level of confidence and assurance that assessment is honest and possible. Communicating a plan for an individual will give them an idea of where they stand, determining if signing the Aviator Retention Pay (ARP) bonus is a fruitful path towards personal and family goals. Isolation of high performing officers without a clearly communicated vision to help them achieve their goals helps neither the organization nor the individual. It will be the leader's responsibility to not overpromise, while maintain realistic expectations within the confines of control, opportunity and service necessity.

### **Support for the Solution**

The recommendations above are well supported by literature in the fields of retention, job satisfaction, and stakeholder engagement. Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman's (1959) two-factor theory explores the factors influencing retention of highly skilled employees, a group in which B-2 pilots clearly represent. Herzberg et al. (1959) proposed that certain factors in a workplace cause job dissatisfaction, while other factors cause job satisfaction. In the structure of this study, the five themes of (1) deployments, (2) family, (3) predictability, (4) flexibility, and (5) financial compensation, represent factors that cause job dissatisfaction, and lead to negative retention. Herzberg's two-

factory theory helped the researcher explore key predictors that influence individuals to remain at a job (retention). Putra, Cho, and Liu (2015) found that highly skilled workers with complicated tasks have intrinsic motivation, while low-level, unskilled workers have extrinsic motivation. In the two-factor theory, Herzberg et al. suggested certain aspects of work led to job dissatisfaction, and separate features led to job satisfaction (Lumadi, 2014). Herzberg et al. identified features of job satisfaction as motivators, and aspects of job dissatisfaction as hygiene factors. Hygiene factors include (a) policy and administration, (b) quality of supervision, (c) pay or salary, (d) relationship with others, (e) work conditions, and (f) job security (Herzberg et al., 1959; Mitchell, 2013). Motivators include (a) achievement, (b) recognition, (c) responsibility, and (d) growth and advancement (Herzberg et al., 1959; Mitchell, 2013). The participants for this study reflect a nearly identical view of the issues causing negative retention in the B-2 community.

### **Implementation of the Proposed Solution**

A 2016 survey by the Society of Human Resource Management shows that employee recognition and engagement is key to retaining good employees (“Society”, 2016). Although 51% of supervisors say they recognize employees who do a good job, only 17% of the employees at the same organizations report that their supervisors do well at recognizing them (“Society”, 2016). An astounding 64% of Americans who leave their jobs say they do so because they do not feel appreciated (Robbins, 2000). The USAF is no different, and exit surveys are communicating the same sentiments. In fact, of the top five reasons why Airman left the service in 2015, four of them were directly related to a lack of appreciation (“Military Pilot Shortage,” 2017).

Although almost 90% of all organizations and businesses in the United States have some form of employee recognition program (Bersin, 2012), job satisfaction and employee engagement are actually *declining*. In a 2012 poll, Gallup (2013) found that only 30% of American employees are actively involved in and emotionally committed to their place of employment. This is the highest level of disengagement found since the research began in 2000.

### **Defining Authentic Appreciation**

Traditional approaches to employee recognition (awards and rewards) need to be reevaluated. Continuing these activities may actually increase the negativity within a work environment. Learning what each individual employee values and then communicating appreciation to them in ways that are perceived as authentic is critical to having a positive result (White, 2014b). This approach defines authentic appreciation, wherein appreciation is tailored towards the individuals physiological, social, and behavioral needs. White (2014a) contends that there exist four conditions that need to be present in order for a team member to feel appreciated; appreciation is communicated regularly, appreciation is communicated through language and action important to the recipient, appreciation is personal and individualized, and appreciation feels authentic (p. 32-33).

### **Creating Authentic Leaders**

The USAF uses a series of professional military education (PME) courses to train and education the officer corps on leadership fundamentals, and service doctrine. After commissioning this done at Air University (AU) on Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama. There are three core courses available to officers by elite

selection, Squadron Officer College (SOC), Air Command and Staff College (ACSC), and Air War College (AWC). Officers are expected to complete PME commensurate with their rank either via correspondence, or in-residence. Currently, the SOC course is six-weeks, ACSC and AWC last just under a year, and are regionally accredited Masters (M.A.) programs.

Despite the high level of academia, there is little continuity between PME syllabi. The SOC curriculum focuses on the Full Range Leadership Model, which emphasizes transformational leadership over transactional leadership (Sosik & Jung, 2010). The first mention of authentic leadership occurs in ACSC, and is omitted from the AWC curriculum (Weichert, 2013). PME represents the USAF's mechanism to instill desired leadership qualities into their officer corps, and thus is the most likely and opportune time to teach the values of authentic leadership. If the service can authentically promote transparent organizational communication, and also guide employees to assist in building a transparent communication culture within the organization, they will all enjoy a climate of truth and openness so that each member feels valued, respected, and desires to be engaged. As a side benefit, personal outcomes (employee satisfaction, commitment, work/life/spiritual enrichment) and organizational outcomes (productivity, turnover, knowledge, moral health) will be influenced, positively (Jiang & Men, 2017; Richardson & Hinton; Schwartz & Porath, 2014).

## **Implications**

### **Practical Implications**

The retention of qualified military personnel is essential to preserving morale and unit readiness and to avoiding the costs associated with training replacement workers in

essential skills. The military services spend large amounts of money on basic and specialized flight training. It can take as much as two years before student pilots are awarded their “wings” and become a *rated* officer. This training is only the foundation for the sophisticated skill set that is required to fly some of the most advanced aircraft in the world. The training requires a large commitment from both the pilot and the service, with pilots having one of the longest service obligations of any specialty in the military. Retaining these highly invested in human-assets has a number of implications.

According to Warwick (2017), the implications of a pilotless air service would render it incomplete and would inevitably mean global defeat. The retention issue also impacts national security. At the current decline, the USAF would not have enough fighter pilots in the next 10 years to man squadrons at home or abroad, crumbling the readiness of the United States’ first line of defense (Rinehart, 2017). Air Force Chief of Staff, General David Goldfein accentuated the issue by saying, “We are in a crisis. We’re 1,500 pilots short, and if we don’t find a way to turn this around, our ability to defend the nation is compromised” (Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs, 2017).

### **Implications for Future Research**

Future research is needed to specifically look at the bomber community as a critical element of national defense. The focus should pivot from the fighter pilot community ubiquitously to a more broad and comprehensive view of all pilots in all platforms. The source of retention qualms within each micro-culture will be telling of where to begin. Leaders have to know the root cause of a problem before they can attempt to solve it. It is the researcher’s view that community level research could open

the aperture for leadership at the lower levels to begin working on immediate and effective solutions.

The USAF has come a long way since the beginning of this project on allocating and devoting resources to the retention crisis. They are falling short on communicating their plans to boost retention, leaving pilots in the dark on where things are headed. A centralized information hub would increase communication and alleviate potential misinformation. A social media campaign can be extremely effective in communicating quickly and efficiently to stakeholders (Mergel, 2012; Yates, & Paquette, 2011). A single-source center for retention information would help control rumors and allow pilots make educated retention decisions based on real-time data communicated directly from the source (Grunig & Grunig, 1992).

### **Summary of the Study**

With tremendous attention and resources dedicated to the fighter pilot staffing collapse, little is being said about the manning status of the other USAF platforms (Burns, 2017). The USAF is rightfully undergoing organizational triage, attempting to attack the most looming crisis first. However, despite concentration on the fleeing fighter pilots, there are other retention issues forthcoming. Notably, the bomber pilot community is undergoing its own form of retention recoil. Specifically, a steadfast decline in ARP take rates over the last four years have largely gone unnoticed, indicating a pending exodus. In FY2014, FY15, FY16 and FY17, take rates for bomber pilots dropped from 67%, 57%, 50%, and 46%, respectively (Beard, 2018). Across the entire bomber force, including active duty, Air National Guard, and Air Force Reserve, the community is manned at 76.6% (Beard, 2018). In the same comparison, the fighter

community is manned higher at 79.6% (Beard, 2018). This precipitous decline represents a complex, real world problem that needs to be addressed.

For this constructivist grounded theory study a total of 14 participant interviews were conducted, recorded and professionally transcribed by Rev, a transcription service. Each interview was treated as an individual case, and was hand coded according to a set of themes (i.e., acceptance of the aviation bonus, motivators for staying or leaving the service, idealized improvements for retention, and an assessment of quality of life, culture, financial opportunity, and professional development), and then compared against each other. As the transcriptions were returned to the researcher, each interview was coded to isolate major themes, which were based on the questions in the interview protocol.

Questions in the interview protocol pointed to specific topics intended to isolate themes that would answer the primary research question: Why are B-2 pilots in the USAF opting to leave the service at the expiration of their Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training (SUPT) Active Duty Service Commitment (ADSC)? The analysis of qualitative data is a critical step to extracting themes and sub-themes (Miles, 1979). The point of analysis is to find “patterns, insights, or concepts that seem promising” (Yin, 2014, p. 162). The qualitative results of this study concluded that pilots justified their departure based on a negative perception of the following areas: (1) deployments, (2) family, (3) predictability, (4) flexibility, and (5) financial compensation.

The interviews were telling of the current retention environment that exists in the B-2 community. Overall, the 14 participants continue to hold a positive view of the USAF, and their dedicated service to the nation. Only 2 of the 14 (14%) cited a “worse”

overall opinion of the service now, versus when they first entered. Collectively, the participants cited training, job satisfaction, benefits (i.e., medical, pay, and access to base facilities, etc.), camaraderie, and unique job opportunities as positive retention influencers. However, despite the positive overall impression of the service, and a number of positive retention influencers, only one (7%) answered that they were planning on accepting the ARP and continue service in the USAF active duty. Zero participants from the FY2007 answered affirmatively to taking the bonus, and only one participant from the FY2006 answered “yes” to planning on taking the bonus when eligible. Furthermore, the data analysis revealed five major emergent themes that were directly tied to (1) deployments, (2) family, (3) predictability, (4) flexibility, and (5) financial compensation. Whereas not all inclusive, the five major themes were typically reoccurring and are indicative of trends that exist within the community. Lastly, the participants were asked to rank the following factors in order from most important to least important: (1) quality of life (QOL), (2) cultural, (3) financial, and (4) professional. Overwhelmingly they ranked QOL as the number one most influencing factor to positive retention. Subsequent rankings were cultural, professional, and financial, respectively.

The identified themes of this study echo similar concerns from pilots across the USAF. Air Force leadership understands that pilots are leaving due to a plethora of factors. Secretary of the Air Force Dr. Heather Wilson points to the following as key evidence for poor retention, “Long and too frequent combat deployments, inadequate pay and benefits, and the associated temptation for military pilots to take better-paying airline jobs” (as cited in Axe, 2018, p. 2.” Despite leadership’s apparent awareness of the

problem, pilots perceive that too little is being done to remedy the situation fast enough to matter.

If Air Force leadership continues to promise the American people that the service is ready to fight tonight – a promise that offers American blood and treasure in pursuit of national objectives, then it must stifle the pilot retention crisis immediately. This is an all hands-on deck situation that must be met with the most disciplined and serious of actions. Participants within this study are experiencing the opposite; a laissez-faire leadership approach has crept into the B-2 pilot community and pilots are leaving at the rate of 86% or higher per year group. This devastating purge will inevitably have second and third order effects that have yet to appear, but will likely surface as a lack of experienced, highly seasoned instructor pilots charged with grooming the next generation. This void could uncover perils unrecoverable by man or machine and leave the nation less guarded and exposed to uncertain vulnerabilities. The B-2 acts a strategic deterrent – a credible threat to hold America’s enemies at risk anytime, anywhere. Without competent and experienced pilots to fill the cockpit the credibility of the deterrent is weakened.

Leadership in the B-2 community should adopt the mnemonic  $A^3BC^2$ . This grounded theory will help secure the retention future of the pilots needed for future positions, and conflicts. Leadership should authentically appreciate and advocate for their pilots and promote their wellbeing, curbing “pilot shaming” and reinstating a warrior culture within the Wing. They should seek to increase financial compensation wherever and however possible to help compete with the civilian marketplace, and to make true on their words that pilots are valued for their contributions, level of responsibility, and critical function of the air service. Finally, leaders are obligated to

communicate a clear career path for pilots who desire predictability and who are making long term decisions for their families based on what the future holds for them. The Air Force has been here before, and with a history of quelling retention shortfalls a solution is placed squarely on the horizon.

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*Appendix A***Interview Protocol**

Interview Protocol: Retention Intentions: Deciding the Future of the Force

Time of Interview: TBD

Date: TBD

Place: Whiteman AFB, MO

Interviewer: Stephen Bressett

Interviewee: TBD (USAF B-2 pilots approaching the ARP, or either have accepted or declined)

Position of Interviewee: B-2 Instructor Pilot

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this research project about pilot retention in the B-2 community. **This interview should last approximately 45-60 minutes.** I want to remind you that your comments will remain confidential and anonymous. Please sign the consent form, and know that you can take a break at any time. If you have any questions regarding this interview or its intended uses please do not hesitate to ask.

Questions:

1. What has your experience been with the USAF from the time of your commission through today? Do you generally feel better or worse about the service, and why?
2. What do you think the USAF does well regarding pilot welfare?
3. What do you think the USAF could improve on regarding pilot welfare?
4. Have you accepted the Aviator Retention Pay (pilot bonus)? or do you plan to accept when you are eligible?
5. What are/would be/were your key motivators for accepting, or declining the pilot bonus?
6. What are/would be/were your key motivators for leaving or staying in the service?
7. Where do you think the responsibility lies for solving the pilot retention crisis?
8. What are three things the HQ USAF could do to improve pilot retention?
9. What are three things the Major Command (MAJCOM) could do to improve pilot retention?
10. What are three things the 509<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing could do to improve pilot retention?
11. What are three things the 509<sup>th</sup> Operations Group could do to improve pilot retention?
12. What would it take for the USAF to do in order to retain you for a 20-year total career as an aircrew member?
13. Which of the following areas would influence your decision to stay the most – financial, cultural, or professional? (Financial meaning more pay to match civilian counterparts, cultural meaning an adjustment to USAF policies and practices {ie, additional duties, support functions, etc.}, and professional meaning the opportunity to consistently promote, compete with like peers, progress within the organization {school, command, etc})
14. If there is something additional you would like to add about your experience within the USAF that I have not asked, please describe that for me.

*Appendix E***Creighton Institutional Review Board Approval****Institutional Review Board**

2500 California Plaza • Omaha, Nebraska 68178  
 phone: 402.280.2126 • fax: 402.280.4766 • email:  
 irb@creighton.edu

DATE: April 13, 2018

TO: Stephen Bressett, EdD(c)  
 FROM: Creighton University IRB-02 Social Behavioral

PROJECT TITLE: [1216155-1] Bleeding Talent: A Qualitative Study of Pilot Retention in the B-2 Community  
 SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS  
 DECISION DATE: April 13, 2018

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category #2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The following items were reviewed in this submission:

- Application Form - Application for Determination of Exempt Status Observation, Survey, Interview.doc (UPDATED: 03/25/2018)
- Creighton - IRB Application Form - Creighton - IRB Application Form (UPDATED: 03/25/2018)
- Other - Participants Bill of Rights for Research.docx (UPDATED: 03/25/2018)
- Other - Participant Email.docx (UPDATED: 03/25/2018)
- Other - Participant Recruitment Email.docx (UPDATED: 03/25/2018)
- Proposal - Background and Significance.docx (UPDATED: 03/25/2018)
- Protocol - Interview Protocol.docx (UPDATED: 03/25/2018)

This project has been determined to be exempt from Federal Policy for Protection of Human Subjects as per 45CFR46.101 (b) 2.

All protocol amendments and changes are to be submitted to the IRB and may not be implemented until approved by the IRB. Please use the modification form when submitting changes.

If you have any questions, please contact Christine Scheuring at 402-280-3364 or christinescheuring@creighton.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Creighton University IRB-02 Social Behavioral's records.

*Appendix C***Participant Recruitment Email**

<Date>

Dear Potential Research Participant,

I am a doctoral student in the Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program in Leadership at Creighton University. I am currently working on my dissertation titled “Bleeding Talent: A Qualitative Study of Talent Retention in the B-2 Pilot Community.” I would like to invite you to be a participant in this research study by agreeing to be interviewed.

My plan is to interview active duty B-2 pilots who are in the 2006 and 2007 year-groups, and are currently considering signing the Aviators Retention Bonus, or already have signed, or declined it. During the interview, I will ask questions about your perceptions of the B-2 community. I expect the interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. Each interview will be recorded and then transcribed by a professional service. If requested, a copy of the transcript will be made available for you. In some cases, a follow-up call with you may be requested to clarify responses or gather additional data. Please know that your confidentiality and anonymity are assured throughout this study.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. Should you choose to participate, please let me know as soon as possible of your interest. I am available if you have any questions regarding the study. Thank you in advance for your time.

Regards,

Stephen Bressett, EdD Candidate  
Creighton University  
413-522-2607  
sjb63739@creighton.edu

*Appendix D***Participant Email**

<Date>

Dear Participant

I am a doctoral student Creighton University's Doctoral Program in Leadership. I am currently working on my dissertation and would like to invite you to be a participant in the study.

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

The purpose of this study is to gain understanding for the retention issues experienced within the B-2 pilot community. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are currently a B-2 pilot in the 2006 or 2007 year-group.

**DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES**

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will consist of a 45-60 minute interview as well as 30 minutes to confirm the accuracy of the transcript of the interview.

During the study you may expect the following study procedures to be followed: I will schedule a time to conduct the interview. The interview will be conducted over the telephone. During the 1-hour interview, I will ask you a series of questions and with your permission, will record the interview using conference calling recording software. The audio file will then be transcribed into a written format by a third party. The original audio file will be maintained by me, the principal investigator and erased 3 years following my dissertation defense. After the initial interview, I may come back to you to clarify comments or to request additional information. Preliminary results of the study will be provided to you for your feedback.

**PARTICIPANT RIGHTS**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide not to participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**RISKS**

While participating in this study you may experience the following risks: There are not foreseeable risks from participating in this study.

**BENEFITS**

If you decide to participate in this study there may be a benefit to you in that the study may bring to light your perceptions of B-2 pilot retention that were not previously considered. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit the B-2 community by presenting evidence-based recommendations to leadership on how to improve pilot retention.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Creighton University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records will contain no private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: A pseudonym, or fictitious name will be assigned and emailed to you prior to the interview and used during the interview to ensure protection of your identity and it will also be used during the transcription process and in the final reporting process. I will have a key linking your real name to your pseudonym, which will be kept in a password protected computer file, accessible only by me. I will maintain this key file for a period of 3 years after my dissertation completion at which time it will be deleted from my hard drive. Your real name and any identifying information will not appear in any supporting documents of this study and if the results are published, your identity will remain confidential as well.

**COSTS AND COMPENSATION**

You will not have any costs from participating in this study and you will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**BILL OF RIGHTS**

As a participant in a research study, you have certain rights. Please see attached document for these rights.

<Attachment>

**QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS**

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study, contact me at (413) 522-2607, Sjb63739@creighton.edu.
- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects, please contact Creighton University's Institutional Review Board at 402-280-2126. Should you choose to participate, please let me know of your interest. If you are available for an interview, please provide some convenient times to schedule an interview.

Sincerely,

Stephen Bressett

*Appendix E***Participants Bill of Rights for Research**

As a participant in a research study, you have the right:

1. To have enough time to decide whether or not to be in the research study, and to make that decision without any pressure from the people who are conducting the research.
2. To refuse to be in the study at all, or to stop participating at any time after you begin the study.
3. To be told what the study is trying to find out, what will happen to you, and what you will be asked to do if you are in the study.
4. To be told about the reasonably foreseeable risks of being in the study.
5. To be told about the possible benefits of being in the study.
6. To be told whether there are any costs associated with being in the study and whether you will be compensated for participating in the study.
7. To be told who will have access to information collected about you and how your confidentiality will be protected.
8. To be told whom to contact with questions about the research, about research-related injury, and about your rights as a research subject.
9. If the study involves treatment or therapy:
  1. To be told about the other non-research treatment choices you have.
  2. To be told where treatment is available should you have a research-related injury, and who will pay for research-related treatment.