



Conversion of Air National Guard (ANG) Technicians to Active Guard Reserve (AGR) Members Degrades Readiness; the 2019 Conversion Process Undermines ANG's Credibility and Rationale for Future Conversions

A RAND report shows that conversion of ANG technicians to AGRs degrades readiness. An August 2018 ANG message admits that the 2019 conversion process “undermines” both ANG’s “credibility” and its “rationale for future military technician to AGR initiatives.”

Conversion of Technicians to AGRs Degrades Readiness

Conversion of ANG technicians to AGRs reduces maintenance productivity by decreasing team experience and stability.

AGRs—because of their right to retire at any age after 20 years of service, such as age 38; and their greater frequency of reassignment—are more like active-duty personnel than technicians. Technicians reach normal retirement only in their late fifties or at age 60 and usually spend their entire careers at the same location.

A 2008 RAND Report noted the “striking difference in productivity” between the current technician-majority ANG maintenance units and active-duty counterparts:

ANG F-16 units . . . meet the required standards for aircraft maintenance with a workforce that [is] about one-third the size of [an] active-duty counterpart. In fact, the number of flying hours generated per maintainer is more than twice as high in an ANG unit.

RAND Project Air Force, Annual Report (2008) (RAND Report) at 42, 44. The Report explained:

Greater Experience and Stability in the ANG Workforce Make Its Aircraft Maintenance Units More Productive Than Their Active-Duty Counterparts

. . .

Besides having an average of only seven years of experience, . . . active-component maintainers generally move to a new assignment every three years. Even if they work on the same airframe or perform the same type of repair, there is a certain amount of turbulence each time new teams are formed. On the other hand, ANG teams are relatively stable. *The average full-time technician has over 15 years' experience and has been at one location most of his or her career.*

Id. at 44-45. (Emphasis added.) Converting ANG technicians to AGRs makes ANG maintenance units more like active-duty units. Due to identical retirement rights, the average experience level in an AGR-majority unit sinks toward the seven years typical of active-duty



units.¹ And, because AGRs may apply for vacant positions nationwide,² maintenance teams become less stable, with more frequent turbulence.³

Technician-majority ANG maintenance units are three times as productive as their active-duty counterparts—a “striking difference in productivity.” RAND Report at 42. Converting technician-majority units into AGR-majority units makes them more like active-duty units, reducing their productivity.

The Conversion Process in Fiscal Year 2019 Undermines ANG’s Credibility and its Rationale for Future Conversions

In August 2018 ANG Director Lieutenant General L. Scott Rice and Brigadier General Steven S. Nordhaus wrote messages to the State National Guards announcing conversion of 3,183 technicians to AGR. LTG Rice asserted that the ANG had selected positions for conversion “using 4 guiding principles: [r]eadiness, . . . critical AFSCs, location factors, and special military mission needs,” and that conversion of the selected positions “maximizes recruiting, retention, readiness and the overall lethality of our force.” BG Nordhaus added, “Our FAMs [Functional Area Managers] methodically placed the resources where they anticipated having the greatest impact on military readiness.”

BG Nordhaus said the States had flexibility to change the positions on the ANG conversion list but warned them:

The need to maintain program integrity on the UMD [Unit Manning Document] (i.e., keeping the resources [the positions] in the Program Element [technician or AGR] in which it was programmed) stems from the fact that this military technician to AGR initiative was staffed through AF [Air Force], OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense], and ultimately Congress, and *allowing resources to flow across Program Elements on the UMD* [that is, changing to technician a position programmed by ANG to be AGR, or vice versa] *undermines not only NGB’s [National Guard Bureau’s] credibility but our rationale for future military technician to AGR initiatives*. Please keep a strategic

¹ AGR retirement rights also make AGR-majority units far more costly than technician-majority units. *See*, CNA, Report on the Termination of Military Technician as a Distinct Personnel Management Category (September 2013), Vol. 1, p. 2 (AGR retirement costs 34% higher than technician retirement costs due to earlier AGR retirement age). To replace a technician who provides 40 years of service, two AGRs who retire after 20 years are required. During the second twenty-year period the retired pay of the first AGR must be paid as well as the active duty pay of the second AGR—an enormous increase in cost. Further, the second AGR starts the second twenty-year period as a new, inexperienced Guard member, while the experienced technician continues to work at peak proficiency.

² *See, e.g.*, Lieutenant Colonel Beegles, Director Human Resources Office, California National Guard, AGR Realignment PowerPoint document (2018) at slide 4 (announcing nationwide recruitment to fill AGR positions).

³ *See*, Institute for Defense Analysis, *Analysis of Alternative Mixes of Full-Time Support in the Reserve Components*



(August 2017) (IDA Report) at v (data support “[a]dvantages of the MT [military technician] program [over AGRs] in position stability and career longevity”; further research needed). *See also* n. 11, *infra*.mindset when considering realignment of these resources as ANG, AF, and OSD leadership expect measurable improvements primarily in terms of your units’ C-ratings but also with recruiting and retention of both fulltime and DSG [Drill Status Guard] members. [Emphasis added.]⁴

The conversion process in Fiscal Year 2019 did not implement the concepts stated in LTG Rice’s and BG Nordhaus’s August messages. The States changed 82% of the positions that ANG initially had designated for conversion to AGR.⁵ On March 14, 2019, a memorandum by LTG Rice dropped all pretense of rational ANG determination of the positions to be converted:

My staff provided a list of recommended realignment positions to start the realignment process and provide flexibility. *This realignment process allows the “54” to substitute positions throughout their organization and we have flexibility to move the realignment to other units.* [Emphasis added.]⁶

In its June 11, 2019, Report on the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, the Senate Armed Services Committee wrote:

The committee is concerned that the Air National Guard did not properly validate its requirements under its realignment initiative, relying instead on a wish list from the States rather than a rigorous and analytical process to determine what positions should be realigned, could be realigned, and what should remain technician.⁷

The Committee’s concern is well-founded. The irrational implementation of the realignment in Fiscal Year 2019 “undermines not only NGB’s credibility but [ANG’s] rationale for future military technician to AGR initiatives”—just as BG Nordhaus’s August message said.

ANG’s willingness to allow the realignment to proceed in total disregard of its “guiding principles”—which, purportedly, “methodically placed” technician positions on the ANG conversion list according to “critical AFSCs, location factors, and special military mission needs” to “maximize [] recruiting, retention, readiness and the overall lethality of our force”—

⁴The C-rating system evaluates “unit manning, equipment, and training” readiness. Senate Committee on Armed Services, 94th Cong., 1st Sess., Hearing on S. 920, Part 3 Manpower (Feb. 24-28 and Mar. 4, 1975) at 1681. “The C-rating legend is as follows: C-1 = fully ready; C-2 = substantially ready; C-3 = marginally ready; C-4 = not ready.” *Id.*

⁵ Adriene R. Dallas, Chief, Labor/Employee Relations Branch, Technician Personnel Division, National Guard Bureau, NCR Teleconference 25 August 2010.

⁶ Lieutenant General L. Scott Rice, Director, Air National Guard, Memorandum for the Adjutants General, Subject: Military Technician/Active Guard Reserve (AGR) Realignment (March 14, 2019).

⁷ S.Rep. 48, 116th Cong., 1st Sess. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 (S. 1790) (Committee on Armed Services June 11, 2019) at 152.



suggests that ANG is concerned more with the number of conversions than which positions are converted. ANG's principal desire is *numerous* conversions.

The Defense Department's report on the feasibility of converting technicians to AGRs suggests this as well. The report says ANG wants its force mix to be 25,045 AGRs and 8,862 technicians.⁸ This is a 10,281 increase of the September 2017 AGRs and a 13,241 decrease of the September 2017 technicians.⁹ Yet the report identifies only one career field, pilots, in which retention is a problem and names only four others—Space; Cyber; Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance; and Remotely Piloted Aircraft—as among those “ideally suited for conversion.”¹⁰ The report offers no reason why these four atypical career fields should be converted; but, even if they should, this does not justify the enormous conversion—including conversion of typical maintenance positions—that the ANG desires. The report states no reason why maintenance positions should be converted. It never addresses the subject.¹¹

⁸ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, Report to Congress on the Feasibility and Advisability of Converting Military Technician Positions to Personnel Performing Active Guard and Reserve Duty (Transmitted to Congress September 25, 2017) (Feasibility Report) at 21, Table 3.

⁹ The decrease in technicians is greater than the increase in AGRs because some of the technicians are converted to Title 5 employees, who are not required to be military members.

¹⁰ Feasibility Report at 6 and 20. Regarding pilots, the report, at 6, states, “MilTech pilots are most affected by the shortfall—only 64 percent of MilTech pilot positions are filled. Many MilTech pilots are believed to have vacated their positions for pilot jobs outside the federal government that offered more pay. By comparison, AGR pilot positions are filled at 87 percent.” This statement is misleading. Whether an unfilled pilot position is designated technician or AGR is arbitrary. All of the unfilled positions could be designated AGR positions, resulting in 100% of the technician positions being filled, with the entire shortfall being in the AGR positions. Further, higher private sector pay makes retention of pilots difficult irrespective of whether they are technicians or AGRs. Converting technician pilots to AGRs will not solve the problem, because private sector pay is higher than AGR pay, not just technician pay.

¹¹ The IDA Report, at v, states that there is no “clearly apparent” “relative readiness benefit” achieved by converting technicians to AGRs and, as noted, also states that data support “[a]dvantages of the MT [military technician] program [over AGRs] in position stability and career longevity.” *Id.* The Feasibility Report, at 13, acknowledges this as well: “the turbulence generated by a large scale conversion of dual status MilTechs to AGR over a short period of time would lead to a decline in force experience, capability, and continuity. This decline would be attributable not only to the loss of expertise and continuity inherent in the MilTech force, but also to the likelihood of a significant AGR shortfall.”