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September 5, 2018

Chairman  
The Honorable Jack Reed  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate

The Honorable Mac Thornberry  
Chairman  
The Honorable Adam Smith  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
House of Representatives

**Military Education: Reporting Requirements on Air Force Enlisted Personnel Attending Officer Training**

Professional military education (PME) programs are intended to develop military personnel throughout their careers for the intellectual demands of complex contingency operations and major conflicts. In 2016, the Air Force began a pilot program enrolling selected enlisted personnel (Chief Master Sergeants) in the Air War College's 10-month officer in-residence professional military education training course.<sup>1</sup> According to Air Force officials, the stated goal of this pilot program was to better develop enlisted personnel who had demonstrated a high potential for serving in strategic level positions and ultimately prepare those personnel to serve directly within the Air Force headquarters and joint military structures. Traditionally, the Air University's Air War College educates senior military officers, federal agencies' senior civilian personnel, and international students so that they might lead in a strategic environment—emphasizing the employment of airpower in joint operations. As of May 2018, 11 Chief Master Sergeants had graduated from the Air War College's in-residence officer professional military education training course.

Section 547 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2018 required the Air Force to submit a report to Congress on the attendance of enlisted personnel at the officer in-residence professional military education training course.<sup>2</sup> It also required that we assess whether the conclusions and assertions in the Air Force's report are comprehensive, fully

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<sup>1</sup>Typically, senior enlisted personnel receive strategic leadership training through the Air Force's 20-day in-residence Chief Master Sergeant Leadership Course (senior leader development seminar). The Chief Master Sergeant Leadership Course is part of the Air University (but not of the Air War College) and is also offered at Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base, Alabama. In comparison, senior military officers receive strategic leadership training through the Air War College's 10-month in-residence course. In August 2018, Congress passed and the President signed into law the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019. This law prohibits the obligation or expenditure of funds for the purpose of the attendance of enlisted personnel at senior-level and intermediate-level professional military education courses. Pub. L. No. 115-232, § 559 (2018).

<sup>2</sup>Pub. L. No. 115-91, § 547 (2017).

supported, and sufficiently detailed, and identify any shortcomings, limitations, or other reportable matters that affect the quality of the findings or conclusions of the report. The Air Force submitted its report (referred to hereafter as the Air Force's report) to Congress on April 25, 2018.<sup>3</sup>

We (1) assessed the extent to which the Air Force's report addressed the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2018 reporting requirements and (2) presented additional information that might be useful to Congress in its oversight of enlisted personnel attending officers' professional military training. We determined the extent to which the Air Force's report addressed the reporting requirements by comparing the contents of the Air Force's report with the requirements established in section 547 of the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2018 by using a scorecard methodology. Specifically, we

- reviewed the language of section 547 to identify and document the reporting requirements;
- developed, based on the reporting requirements, scoring criteria to assess the report content;
- assessed the extent to which the report's content addressed the reporting requirements by having two analysts independently compare the report's content with the scoring criteria; and
- compiled scorecard results of the two analysts in an anonymous format and, with the assistance of a research methodologist, reached a consensus on the final assigned score for each reporting requirement.

Based on this review, the team determined whether the report's content addressed, partially addressed, or did not address each of the reporting requirements as follows:

- *Addressed*: The report contains information related to the specific reporting requirements.
- *Partially addressed*: The report contains some, but not all, of the information required by the specific reporting requirement.
- *Not addressed*: The report does not contain any information related to the specific reporting requirement.

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<sup>3</sup>United States Air Force, *Enlisted Personnel at Officer Professional Military Education* (Washington, D.C.: April 2018).

To provide our views on additional information that the Air Force could have included in the report that might be useful for congressional oversight, we obtained information available to the Air Force as it was preparing its report. Specifically, we reviewed academic surveys from the Air War College, and interviewed and obtained written responses to specific questions from the Air Force's Force Development Integration Office (i.e., the office responsible for conducting the pilot program), which confirmed that data were available as the Air Force was preparing its report.<sup>4</sup> We also interviewed Air Force officials who provided information for the support regarding their rationale for choosing the level of detail that they provided for the reporting requirements in the Air Force's report.

We conducted this performance audit from January 2018 to September 2018 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

### **Background**

The primary purpose of professional military education is to develop military personnel throughout their careers to support the intellectual demands of complex contingencies and major conflicts. The military services provide professional military education at their respective staff and war colleges. Each service educates service members in their core competencies according to service needs. Air Force colleges, for example, primarily teach air and space warfare. Similarly, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps colleges focus on land, maritime, and expeditionary warfare, respectively.

The Air Force Chief Master Sergeant Leadership Course educates approximately 750 Chief Master Sergeants a year. It is the highest level of enlisted professional military in-residence learning curriculum designed to bridge students' perspectives from operational to the strategic level.

The Air Force's Air War College annually educates approximately 250 in-residence senior military officers and civilian students at Maxwell Air Force Base to serve as critical and strategic thinkers and as national security senior leaders. One of its key tasks is to prepare officers to lead at the strategic level across the range of military operations, in joint, interagency, and multinational environments. The Air War College in-residence courses develop cross-domain mastery of air, space, and cyberspace and their strategic contributions to national security and advances innovative thought on national security issues.

### **The Air Force Report Addressed All Ten Statutory Requirements**

The Air Force's April 2018 report to Congress on selected enlisted personnel (Chief Master Sergeants) attending the Air Force's Air War College's 10-month officer in-residence professional military education training courses addressed each of the ten statutory requirements contained in section 547 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018 as shown in table 1.<sup>5</sup> Air Force officials stated that to support the findings in the report they coordinated with subject matter experts at the Air Force's Air University Air War College.

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<sup>4</sup>Documents obtained from the Air War College and the Air Force's Force Development Integration Office include academic year 2017 and midway progression academic year 2018 Air War College survey reports regarding opportunities to maximize building relations with Chief Master Sergeants attending the Air War College and sources for the inflation adjustment cost to move a Chief Master Sergeant from one base to another specifically to attend the Air War College.

<sup>5</sup>The eleventh reporting element in section 547 required the Air Force to discuss any other matters in connection with the attendance of enlisted personnel at officer professional military education courses that the Secretary of the Air Force considered appropriate. Because the Secretary did not find any other matters appropriate for inclusion in the report, our review does not discuss the eleventh element.

**Table 1: Summary of the Air Force's Report on the Attendance of Enlisted Personnel at the 10-Month In-Residence Officer Professional Military Education Training Course and Our Assessment of the Extent to Which the Report Addressed the Ten Statutory Requirements**

<b>Requirements provided in section 547 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018</b>	<b>Information the Air Force included to address the requirement</b>	<b>Our assessment of whether the Air Force addressed the requirement</b>
1. The purpose of the attendance of Air Force enlisted personnel at Air Force officer professional military education (PME) in-residence course.	The purpose of the attendance of Chief Master Sergeants at the Air War College in-residence officer course is to target a small number of senior enlisted personnel for developmental opportunities in addition to the opportunities offered in standard enlisted PME courses and is based on unique requirements of current and future leadership positions.	Addressed
2. The objectives for the attendance of such enlisted personnel at such officer PME courses.	The objectives for the attendance of Chief Master Sergeants at the Air War College is to deliberately develop a small number of high-potential Chief Master Sergeants to potentially fill the most senior and strategic-level enlisted positions within the Air Force and Joint military structure.	Addressed
3. The required prerequisites for such enlisted personnel to attend such officer PME courses.	The required prerequisites for the Chief Master Sergeants who graduated in May 2018 were: (a) have a high potential to serve above the Air Force's wing level, (b) score at the top 10 percent of candidates who were approved by the screening board for Command Chief, (c) have earned a bachelor's degree, (d) have completed 18-23 years of service, (e) meet Diversity and Inclusion considerations, (f) have a breadth of experience, and (g) be willing to incur a 3-year active duty service commitment.	Addressed
4. The process for selecting such enlisted personnel to attend such officer PME courses.	The Command Chief screening board selected the 7 Chief Master Sergeants whom graduated in May 2017 from the in-residence Air War College course. The Command Chief screening board consisted of three General Officers, the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force and four Major and Combatant Command Chief Master Sergeants. The candidates were selected based on their potential to serve above the Air Force wing level.	Addressed
5. The impact of the attendance of such enlisted personnel at such officer PME courses on the availability of officer allocations for the attendance of officers at such courses.	The impact of the attendance of these Chief Master Sergeants on the availability of officer Air War College allocations was negligible. Dedicated funds for enlisted training were moved into the officer PME account and no officer on the select or alternate list was denied the opportunity to attend Air War College due to this pilot program.	Addressed
6. The impact of the attendance of such enlisted personnel at such officer PME courses on the morale and retention of officers attending such courses.	The impact of the attendance of these Chief Master Sergeants at the Air War College with regard to the morale and retention of the officers attending the Air War College is difficult to fully measure. There has been positive verbal feedback from Air War College faculty and officer students. There has been no negative feedback received from the Air War College formal end-of-course feedback concerning Chief Master Sergeant attendance.	Addressed
7. The resources required for such enlisted personnel to attend such officer PME courses.	The Air Force estimated the total cost for the 11 Chief Master Sergeants (4 graduating in May 2017 and 7 graduating in May 2018) to attend the Air War College in-residence course was \$239,669 per attendee, a total of approximately \$2.6 million. <sup>a</sup>	Addressed
8. The impact on unit and overall Air Force manning levels of the attendance of such enlisted personnel at such officer PME courses, especially at the statutorily limited end strengths of grades E-8 and E-9.	The impact on unit and overall Air Force manning levels caused by these Chief Master Sergeants attending the Air War College is negligible. Student man-years were used to fund this in-resident PME training course, which allows the losing unit to receive a backfill based on Air Force manning levels. The 7 Chief Master Sergeants who graduated in May 2018 from the Air War College represent approximately 0.27 percent of the Chief Master Sergeant active-duty personnel.	Addressed

Requirements provided in section 547 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018	Information the Air Force included to address the requirement	Our assessment of whether the Air Force addressed the requirement
9. The extent to which graduation by such enlisted personnel from such officer PME course is a requirement for Air Force or joint assignments.	The Air Force's report states that there is no public law that requires Air Force enlisted personnel to graduate from officer professional military education training to meet an Air Force or a joint requirement. Air Force Instruction 36-2640, <i>Executing Total Force Development</i> , guides how the Air Force develops the Total Force (i.e., active and reserve units). One of the instruction's guiding principles is, "Develop a broad, deep pool of qualified candidates for key positions within the United States Air Force."	Addressed
10. The planned assignment utilization for Air Force enlisted graduates of such officer PME courses.	The planned assignment utilization for the 7 Chief Master Sergeants who graduated from the Air War College in-residence program in May 2017 is dependent on appropriate and available senior leader opportunities, skill alignment, and placement cycles. Since they were also selected as Command Chief Master Sergeant candidates, they may initially compete for Air Force wing-level Command Chief, Senior Enlisted Leader or Advisor (joint) or key headquarters staff positions. As with officer Air War College graduates, after completing initial leadership tours, the Chiefs will continue to be considered for other strategic opportunities as Air Force missions dictate.	Addressed

Source: GAO analysis of the Air Force's April 2018 report. | GAO-18-649R

\*Number based on GAO estimate.

### Additional Information on Selected Air Force Enlisted Personnel Attending Officer In-Residence Training That May Be Useful for Congressional Oversight

We identified additional information regarding enlisted personnel (Chief Master Sergeants) attending the 10-month officer in-residence professional military education training course that may be useful to Congress in its oversight of enlisted personnel attending officer professional military education training. The report's main section on the ten reporting requirements was 3 pages long, and most requirements were described in about a paragraph, which meant that few details were presented for any of these requirements.

Air Force officials provided three reasons for not providing more detailed information. First, Air Force officials stated that the questions contained in section 547 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018 did not ask for specific information outside what their report answered. Second, Air Force officials stated that some data, such as on the outplacement of academic year 2017-2018 graduates had not occurred at the time the Air Force's report was provided to Congress. Finally, Air Force officials stated that since the pilot program was in the middle of the second year at the time of the Air Force report, the report included available data, as appropriate.

In our assessment of the Air Force's report and subsequent follow up information obtained from the Air Force, we identified the following additional information that might be useful for congressional oversight of the pilot program:

- Information on how the Air Force had achieved the pilot program's objectives to potentially fill the most senior enlisted positions.** The Air Force's report stated that one of the objectives of the pilot program was to develop high-potential Chief Master Sergeants to potentially fill the most senior enlisted strategic-level positions within the Air Force headquarters and joint military structure. However, the Air Force report lacked supporting information regarding whether this objective had been achieved. Specifically, it did not contain any data on the number of graduates who had been subsequently placed in strategic-level positions within the Air Force headquarters or joint military structure.

Air Force officials stated that at the time their report was released only 4 Chief Master Sergeants had graduated and all had been placed at wing-level command chief positions as intended for their first development step. Additionally, at the time of

the report's release, 7 additional Chief Master Sergeants were enrolled in the Air War College and graduated in May 2018. Air Force officials stated that they did not provide this information in their report because it was not specifically asked of them in section 547 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018. In July 2018, Air Force officials provided us with more detailed pilot program placement information. According to Air Force officials, of the 4 2016-2017 Chief Master Sergeant graduates, 1 had been assigned and 2 were scheduled for assignments in strategic-related positions within the Air Force ahead of the normal developmental progression.<sup>6</sup> The remaining 8 graduates (1 from 2016-2017) were on track with the normal developmental progression.

- **Support for conclusion that enlisted personnel's attendance had not affected the number of training slots available to officers.** The Air Force's report stated that the Air Force transferred student, trainee, and pipeline man-years from the enlisted training account to the officer training account, which effectively increased the officer training slots and avoided any negative effect on the training slots available for officers.

When discussing their report with us, Air Force officials provided us with additional information that though not included in the report illustrates that the attendance of senior enlisted personnel at the Air War College did not negatively affect officer allocations to the Air War College. Specifically, although enlisted personnel attended the officer training, not all available Air Force training slots were filled even after they were offered to enlisted personnel and other sister services' officers who were on the alternate training list. Hence, there were still available spots for officers to attend training.

Specifically, the Air Force officials stated that for academic year 2016-2017 the maximum number of available training slots at the Air War College was 248, of which 99 were programmed for Air Force students. For academic year 2017-2018, the maximum number of available training slots at the Air War College was 245, of which 101 were programmed for Air Force students. The Air Force had an average of 100 slots in the officer in-residence training for academic years 2016-2017 and 2017-2018, and not all of those slots were filled even after being offered to Air Force enlisted personnel and other sister services' officers who were on the alternate training list. A combined total of 182 Air Force officers and enlisted personnel graduated from the officer professional military education training course (91 in 2017 and 91 in 2018) meaning that there were 18 Air Force funded slots that were not filled, and as such did not negatively affect officer attendance in the program.

## Agency Comments

We are not making recommendations in this report. DOD reviewed a draft of this report and provided us with technical comments, which we incorporated where appropriate.

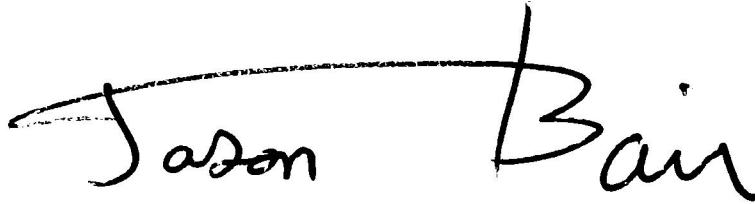
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We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees and to the Secretary of the Air Force. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

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<sup>6</sup> According to the Air Force, the "normal developmental progression" for such assignments would be from 18 through 24 months.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-6881 or [bairj@gao.gov](mailto:bairj@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributions to this report include Vincent Balloon (Assistant Director), Jerome Brown, Martin De Alteriis, Mae Jones, Shahrzad Nikoo, and Barbara Wooten.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jason Bair". The signature is written in a cursive style, with a long horizontal line above the word "Jason" and a large, stylized "B" for "Bair".

Jason Bair  
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Defense Capabilities and Management  
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