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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

FEDERAL PERSONNEL AND
COMPENSATION DIVISION

JUNE 22, 1981

B-203647

The Honorable Caspar W. Weinberger
The Secretary of Defense

Attention: Assistant for Audit Reports

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Subject: [Additional Efforts Needed to Improve Morale,
Welfare, and Recreation Program Management]
(FPCD-81-59)

We recently looked at various aspects of the Department of Defense's (DOD's) morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR) programs and believe that many steps already taken by DOD and the services will improve MWR program management. These steps include (1) the establishment of minimum standards by the Army, (2) periodic needs surveys in the Army and Air Force, (3) DOD's policy directive on the prescribed funding of MWR construction projects, (4) the Air Force Audit Agency's study of MWR management, and (5) a recent study done for the Navy on the Navy and Marine Corps' MWR programs. We found, however, that additional efforts are needed to establish minimum standards and periodic surveys by which to assess needs and monitor progress. We also found that the services' headquarters need specific information on the types of activities offered.

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

MWR programs encompass a broad range of personnel support activities which affect the lives of millions of active duty military personnel, dependents, and retirees. Exchanges, clubs, sports facilities, libraries, and recreation centers are some of the many MWR activities available. DOD considers the MWR program vital to the morale and well-being of service members, believing that it contributes to unit identity, esprit de corps, and improved combat readiness and, therefore, supports the military mission.

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Our objective was to determine whether, under the existing management system(s), the services could accurately assess the type and level of MWR activities needed and determine how to fund them. To accomplish this we looked at how the services (1) identify what activities are necessary to meet the MWR needs of the military population, (2) insure these activities are cost effective, and (3) insure that a minimum level of MWR activities are available within each service.

We obtained information on MWR programs from each of the four services. We reviewed DOD and service MWR directives, instructions, and manuals; analyzed appropriated and nonappropriated fund expenditures for fiscal year 1979 and 1980, as reported under DOD's Instruction 7000.12; and held discussions with responsible officials from the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and the services.

NEED FOR MINIMUM STANDARDS IN MWR PROGRAMS

An important step in establishing an equitable MWR program is to set minimum standards. Meeting these standards would insure a minimum level of MWR activities available to the military population. Each of the services acknowledges that its MWR programs run the gamut from poor to excellent, and they are able to provide examples of the two extremes. We believe that significant differences in the MWR programs offered by the services could adversely affect the morale of service members and therefore impede the military mission. Poorly equipped or substandard MWR programs, especially those in rural areas or overseas where off-base community services are inadequate or nonexistent, may lead to dissatisfaction with military life in general. While we recognize that environmental factors such as climate, topography, and degree of isolation will dictate differences in MWR program content, we believe there may be certain disparities which cannot be justified solely by these external factors.

Progress in establishing standards

At the time of our survey, the Army was the only service to establish MWR minimum standards. Functionally related minimum standards were designed by the Army to measure

current "quality of life" 1/ conditions. The Army's Community Life System, which encompasses MWR, is a major element in its Quality of Life Program. The Army has established the following activities as essential to an MWR program: library activities, unit level activities normally provided in gyms and entertainment centers, intramural sports, recreation center activities, youth activities, arts and crafts (including automotive) activities, music and theater activities, outdoor activities, and competitive sports and clubs. In overseas commands, additional activities include professional entertainment to deployed or isolated units, Armed Forces Recreation Centers, and family-oriented activities in commands where families are authorized.

Compliance with the Army's minimum standards is discretionary. Commanders are expected to use them as a guide, and in conjunction with the results of needs surveys. During base visits, Army headquarters officials may inquire about the guide and how it is being used; however, there is no formal compliance review.

The need for an established standard has also been recognized in a recent Navy contract study 2/ of MWR programs administered by the Navy and Marine Corps. This study recommended designating recreational services as either "essential" or "optional" so that standard minimum facilities could be provided at each installation.

1/The following explanation of the term "quality of life" was offered by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy in his statement delivered on February 18, 1981, before the House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Military Construction:

"'Quality of Life,' as a term, is difficult to define comprehensively. Each Servicemember may evaluate the quality of his or her life in somewhat different terms. Basically the term embraces the human dimension of Service life--the environment in which our people work and live."

2/"Management Analysis of MWR Program, Department of the Navy," Vol. II (Case and Co., Inc., Apr. 16, 1980).

PERIODIC SURVEYS PROVIDE
FOCUS FOR MWR PROGRAMS

A program designed to provide services and activities for continually changing military communities must have some means for assessing MWR needs. Periodic surveys offer an objective and reliable way to do this. Our prior work has addressed this subject of needs determination.

Our 1979 report 1/ on the military club system indicated that clubs may not be effectively meeting the needs of active duty personnel in a responsible and cost-effective manner. And, in a 1980 report 2/ on the MWR construction program, we noted that DOD had not given the services specific guidance on how needs should be determined. Although each service was responsible for determining facility needs, the methodology for determining them varied considerably. This report pointed out weaknesses in the program review, approval, and funding processes, indicating a need to insure that the most urgent construction requirements would be met with the limited funds available.

In 1979, the Army established a requirement for biennial surveys to help determine the MWR needs of service members, and shortly thereafter the Air Force established a similar triennial requirement. These surveys consider personnel interests and available resources and are to be used to justify program changes. The Navy and Marine Corps, on the other hand, did not at the time of this review, conduct periodic surveys; instead they were relying on such methods as recreation councils, committees, and patron polls to assess the needs of their military communities.

INFORMATION ON MWR ACTIVITIES NEEDED

To help identify the most critical needs and highlight MWR program deficiencies, the services must have information on actual MWR activities offered at a particular installation. The central computer systems now in place for each service provide an MWR facilities inventory for individual

1/"Changes Needed In Operating Military Clubs and Alcohol Package Stores" (FPCD-79-9, Jan. 15, 1979).

2/"Proposals For Enhancing DOD's Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Construction Program" (FPCD-80-67, Aug. 27, 1980).

installations. These systems identify real property assets, and their respective condition, but only from an engineering or technical standpoint. The information is incomplete, however, in that there is no way to ascertain from this listing the actual MWR activities offered in a particular facility. Because the services' headquarters do not have information on the actual activities offered, they cannot readily assess the overall content of an MWR program at any location.

CONCLUSIONS

We commend the Army for taking the initiative in establishing minimum standards for its MWR program. Such standards better assure that a minimum level of MWR activities are provided to each service's military population. To insure that a minimum level of MWR activities are available to all eligible military population no matter where they serve our country, we believe that DOD-wide standards must be established.

The Air Force and Army have expanded their efforts to better assess needs by using periodic needs surveys. The Navy and Marine Corps, however, continue to assess their MWR needs primarily by using recreation councils, committees, and polls. We believe that periodic surveys better resolve the weaknesses found in the other methodologies used to determine MWR needs.

We believe the services need to expand their facilities inventory systems to include MWR activities offered. These systems can be used in conjunction with established minimum standards to highlight program deficiencies, and eventually to attain a minimum level of MWR activities for all military communities. Expanded inventory systems will also help the services insure that the limited appropriated and nonappropriated funds for MWR are directed to installations where the needs are most critical.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the Secretary of Defense:

- Direct each service to develop minimum standards for its MWR program. The Army's standards could serve as a basis for development.

- Study the minimum standards established by each service and determine if further DOD-wide requirements should be established.
- Examine the Army and Air Force's methodologies for needs assessment and consider their possible wider applicability to the Navy and Marine Corps.
- Require the services to expand their facilities inventory systems to include details pertinent to the MWR activities offered.

We discussed our observations with responsible OSD and service officials, and they were in general agreement with the intent of our recommendations for an improved management information system.

Although OSD officials expressed concern about the establishment of rigid guidelines to be applied DOD-wide, we believe the guidelines can be flexible enough to adapt to each service's individual characteristics, while at the same time offering a sense of equity DOD-wide.

OSD officials felt that DOD's MWR Coordinating Committee would be an appropriate forum for discussion of the issues raised in our report. According to OSD officials, this committee is scheduled to meet in July 1981. We feel it would be timely for this committee to study the issues raised in this report and to advise the Secretary on the best way to implement our recommendations.

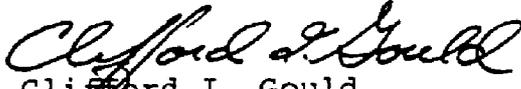
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As you know, section 236 of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 requires the head of a Federal agency to submit a written statement on actions taken on our recommendations. This written statement must be submitted to the House Committee on Government Operations and the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs not later than 60 days after the date of the report. A written statement must also be submitted to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations with an agency's first request for appropriations made more than 60 days after the date of the report.

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We are sending copies of this letter to the Chairmen, House Committee on Government Operations, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, House and Senate Committees on Armed Services, and House and Senate Committees on Appropriations; and the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

Sincerely yours,


Clifford I. Gould
Director



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