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Analysis of SRB and Incentive Pay in the Navy AIRR Community: A Model for Broader Application

December 2024

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Naval Postgraduate School

Prepared for the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA 93943.

ACQUISITION RESEARCH PROGRAM
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE MANAGEMENT
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores strategies to improve retention in the United States Navy's Aviation Rescue Swimmer (AIRR) community. It proposes shifting from a reliance on Selective Reenlistment Bonuses (SRBs) to a combined approach involving qualification-based incentive pays. Survey data from AIRR personnel indicates that combining SRBs with monthly incentives tied to advanced qualifications is a more effective retention strategy than SRBs alone. This approach rewards service members for their skills, fosters professional growth, and reduces costs for the Navy. A cost-benefit analysis shows that retaining qualified AIRRs is significantly more economical than recruiting and training replacements, given the high attrition rates and substantial initial training investments. The findings suggest that performance-based incentives, supported by non-monetary benefits, can better align with the needs of highly skilled personnel, ultimately contributing to a more motivated and experienced workforce. Recommendations include adopting qualification-based incentives, restructuring SRBs to better reflect individual contributions, and incorporating non-monetary incentives to support long-term career satisfaction.

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We are especially grateful to the Enlisted Community Managers of the Naval Aviation Rescue Swimmer Community for their ongoing support and the resources they provided during our research. Your care for the community you represent is encouraging. We understand that this thesis would not have been possible without the world's greatest navy, the U.S. Navy, whose commitment to excellence afforded us the privilege of pursuing new skills, knowledge, and this work while at the Naval Postgraduate School.

Finally, we would like to extend our sincere thanks to our thesis advisors and the Department of Defense Management staff for their guidance, mentorship, and encouragement. Your collective impact on us has been profound, and we hope this thesis will positively contribute to the discussed community just as you have positively impacted our lives.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIRR	Navy Aviation Rescue Swimmer
ARSS	Air Rescue Swimmer School
AWR	Naval Aircrewman Tactical Helicopter
AWS	Naval Aircrewman Helicopter
BAH	Basic Allowance for Housing
BAS	Basic Allowance for Subsistence
CEA	Cost Estimate Analysis
CRAM	Combinatorial Retention Auction Mechanism
DOR	Drop on Request
ECM	Enlisted Community Manager
FRS	Fleet Replacement Squadrons
NACCS	Navy Aircrew Candidate School
NASC	Naval Aviation Schools Command
NATC	Naval Aviation Training Command
NMI	Non-Monetary Incentives
NORU	Navy Recruiting Orientation Unit
RTC	Recruit Training Command
SERE	Survival Evasion Resistance and Escape
SRB	Selective Retention Bonus
SRBMS	SRB Management System
UIP	Universal Incentive Packages

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

Navy Aviation Rescue Swimmers (AIRRs) within the AWS/AWR (Aircrewman Helicopter/ Aircrewman Tactical Helicopter) rates in the Navy are a vital part of naval operations, renowned for their unwavering dedication to saving lives and supporting a broad spectrum of missions worldwide. The role of an AIRR is multifaceted, involving coordination with helicopter pilots, execution of Search and Rescue operations, and collaboration with both military and civilian entities. AIRRs are essential in saving the crew of downed aircraft, providing disaster relief, supporting Naval Special Warfare operations, and conducting anti-submarine warfare, drug interdiction, and other critical missions. The extensive training and preparation required to become an AIRR equip these professionals to excel in the most challenging and unpredictable environments, making them indispensable to the Navy's operational and humanitarian efforts.

The career path of AWS/AWR personnel is structured around achieving advanced qualifications and navigating a demanding rotation between sea and shore assignments. Despite their critical importance, the AWS/AWR community faces significant retention challenges, particularly at the mid-career stages. Understanding and addressing these challenges is crucial to the health of this high-cost community and maintaining a highly skilled and experienced force.

B. FOCUS OF THE STUDY

The focus of this thesis is to explore and refine strategies for retaining servicemembers in the United States Navy, specifically within the AIRR community. Historically, the military has relied on Selective Reenlistment Bonuses (SRBs) as a primary tool for talent retention. However, this thesis argues that combining SRBs with monthly incentive pay, particularly qualification-based incentives, would create a more effective and sustainable retention model. The core of this study proposes that rewarding servicemembers for obtaining valuable qualifications — those that benefit both the Navy

and the individual — not only fosters personal and professional growth but also encourages long-term commitment to the service.

By focusing on qualification-based incentive pay, the Navy can create a system where individuals are motivated to pursue and achieve higher qualifications, knowing that their efforts will be met with ongoing financial rewards. This approach contrasts with the traditional SRB model, which offers a flat bonus to all sailors within a specific zone, regardless of their qualifications or level of effort. This blanket approach may inadvertently promote a sense of complacency, as all individuals, irrespective of their contributions or skill levels, receive the same financial benefit. The proposed shift toward a qualification-based incentive structure aims to mitigate the issue of incentives that give blanket amounts to all individuals, creating a more merit-based retention system.

For the Navy, giving qualification-based incentives and SRBs holds dual benefits. First, it reduces reliance on large, across-the-board SRBs, potentially leading to cost savings by targeting bonuses toward those who have demonstrated significant value through their qualifications. Second, it promotes a culture of continuous improvement and professional development, as sailors are incentivized to enhance their skills and qualifications, ultimately benefiting both the individual and the Navy as a whole.

Furthermore, this thesis underscores the importance of conducting a Cost-Estimate Analysis (CEA) to evaluate the financial and operational implications of retaining qualified personnel within the AIRR community. The high costs associated with training and developing an Aviation Rescue Swimmer make retention not only a strategic priority but also a fiscal necessity. The current training pipeline for Navy rescue swimmers, which spans 93 weeks for AWR and 67 weeks for AWS, represents a substantial investment in both time and resources (J. Husband, personal communication, August 8, 2024). It costs an E-1 sailor approximately $135,139 for the AWS 67-week training pipeline and $187,581 for the 93-week AWR pipeline. according to the FY 2024 Defense Financial Accounting Systems (DFAS) basic pay allowance chart (Defense Financial Accounting Systems [DFAS], n.d.a). These figures do not account for housing and other costs, making the total financial investment even more significant.

The attrition rates further complicate this scenario. According to the Naval Aviation Training Command August, 2024 service brief, the attrition rate for the Aviation Rescue Swimmer School (ARSS) was 47.2%, with drop on request (DOR) rates reaching historic highs. In fact, DORs accounted for 59% of overall attrition within the training pipeline, and with the Navy falling short of recruitment goals by 243 sailors with only five weeks left in the fiscal year, replacing these highly trained individuals becomes a major challenge (J. Frank, personal communication, August 23, 2024).

This high attrition rate increases the risk of replacement, as nearly half of the sailors entering the pipeline do not complete training. Given the steep financial and time investments required, it is far more cost-effective to retain trained and qualified sailors who have already demonstrated their capability by passing all required schools and gaining valuable operational experience. The CEA thus validates the importance of increasing retention incentives—both monetary and non-monetary—to maintain the readiness of the Navy's Aviation Rescue Swimmer community and prevent critical manning shortages in vital commands.

The thesis began with the hypothesis that sailors in the AIRR community would prefer a combination of qualification-based incentives and SRBs, even if it meant a reduction in the total SRB amount. To test this, a survey was conducted to gather data on sailors' preferences and the potential impact of this mixed incentive model on retention. This analysis of the responses was used to determine reenlistment preferences within the AIRR community and highlights critical dissatisfaction with the current Selective Reenlistment Bonus (SRB) structure. The survey of 328 respondents revealed significant uncertainty around reenlistment decisions, with many citing the SRB's lack of individual recognition and fairness as major concerns. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of financial incentives, with many sailors expressing those non-monetary benefits, while appreciated, do not replace the need for monetary compensation. The data suggests that a mixed incentive approach, combining SRBs with qualification-based incentive pay, could more effectively address retention challenges, particularly in the undermanned mid-career ranks. This approach would reward sailors for their qualifications and achievements, fostering a more equitable and motivated workforce. By aligning

incentives with individual performance, the Navy could enhance retention rates, reduce training costs, and retain its most skilled personnel.

This research seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of how targeted, performance-based incentives, backed by a thorough cost estimate analysis, can enhance retention efforts within specialized Navy communities. By doing so, the Navy can sustain a motivated, skilled, and committed workforce, ensuring that critical roles like those of the Aviation Rescue Swimmer are continually filled with experienced and qualified personnel.

C. COST ESTIMATE ANALYSIS

Chapter III entails a cost estimate on what is required for the U.S. Navy to develop a Naval Aviation Rescue Swimmer. The first cost consideration is the required training tracks of both the AWR and AWS designations. We were able to collect training track data for fiscal year 2024 from Naval Aviation Training Command (NATC) through their fiscal year training wall charts via personal communications with the SAR Training Operations Supervisor, Master Chief Husband. This data provided us with the courses of instruction required for each designation. As previously discussed, the time investment of 93 weeks for AWR and 67 weeks for AWS pipelines must be considered (J. Husband, personal communication, August 8, 2024). Another added cost associated with the required training is the associated attrition rates of select schools. Of note the Naval Air Rescue Swimmer School had a 47.2% attrition rate for fiscal year 2024 (J. Frank, personal communication, August 20, 2024). Upon further research retrieved from a FY 2024 ARSS training brief attained via personnel communication with the rescue swimmer enlisted community manager (ECM), it was discovered that 59% of all attrition was due to a drop on request (DOR). This is an important data point in comparison to the previous fiscal year's DOR rate of 47% showing a 12% increase in DORs of ARSS candidates (J. Frank, personal communication, August 20, 2024). This data point illustrates the risk of completion of the required course of instruction at ARSS.

In addition to the required courses of instruction, this chapter also examines monetary cost allowances per candidate. Each candidate is entitled basic pay, we were able to provide the enlisted basic pay wall chart for FY 2024 (DFAS, n.d.a). In terms of rank

each candidate we can assume will be between an E-1 to E-3. We can then proceed to calculate the rough costs of each AWR and AWS candidate throughout the duration of their training tracks based on the factors of time in service and rank. Other costs considered entail basic pay entitlements for subsistence known as basic allowance for subsistence (BAS).

Some costs, however, are not as easy to quantify, such as the opportunity cost of redirecting operational sailors to become instructors. The opportunity cost to the Navy is reflected in the potential missions lost due to redirecting experienced AIRR's to fill instructor billets throughout the U.S. Fleet.

The last and arguably most important cost is the value of experience lost every time an AIRR service member leaves active duty. The hidden costs are in the accrued experience and technical training acquired over a service member's career. This is hard to quantify, but what we can observe is the operational costs required for an AIRR to conduct daily operations. The key takeaway is the recognition of the accrued experience over a service member's career as a benefit that would be lost each time an active AIRR service member retires. This accrued experience cannot be replaced by a recruit, it takes time and years in service to match what was lost.

This is the main driver for why the U.S. Navy needs to invest in its active-duty AIRR servicemembers via incentive pays and retention bonuses. Continued engagement with the AIRR community is vital to receive feedback on what incentives entice retention and in turn help retain the benefit of expertise and experience from leaving the U.S. Fleet.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. INTRODUCTION TO RETENTION INCENTIVES IN SPECIALIZED MILITARY COMMUNITIES

Retention of specialized military personnel, such as AIRRs, is a complex and challenging endeavor that requires careful consideration of both monetary and non-monetary incentives. These specialized personnel are instrumental in executing high-risk, high-reward missions, which makes their retention critical for maintaining operational capabilities. Over the years, the Navy has employed various incentive strategies, including SRBs and career development opportunities, to keep these skilled individuals within the force. However, existing research suggests that relying solely on financial incentives is insufficient to meet the unique retention needs of specialized military personnel. Studies such as those by Alloway and Stockton (2008) and Barry (2001) delve into the complexities of current incentive systems, identifying significant limitations and the need for more tailored approaches to retain these valuable servicemembers. In this chapter, we review a range of literature related to SRBs, cost-effectiveness of retention models, innovative incentive allocation mechanisms, and advanced data-driven approaches to retention. This review provides a foundation for proposing a refined incentive model that is tailored to the specific requirements of the AIRR community.

B. INDIVIDUAL ANALYSES OF KEY STUDIES

1. Alloway and Stockton: Analysis of the Navy's SRB Management System

Alloway and Stockton (2008) conducted an in-depth analysis of the Navy's SRB Management System (SRBMS) and its associated ROGER model, which aims to forecast reenlistment behavior based on factors such as rank, years of service, and occupational specialty. Their analysis revealed significant shortcomings within the SRBMS, particularly in terms of predictive accuracy. Budget over-execution and the inefficient allocation of resources were cited as major concerns, largely attributed to a rigid, advocacy-based decision-making process that lacked the necessary flexibility to adapt to the dynamic needs of the force.

The study emphasizes the need for a more adaptive approach that incorporates real-time data and predictive analytics to improve forecasting accuracy. Alloway and Stockton's 2008 analysis also suggests that the SRBMS could benefit from incorporating a wider range of influencing factors, such as family considerations, geographic preferences, and career aspirations, which were not adequately captured in the ROGER model. Expanding the SRBMS to include these variables could lead to a more holistic and effective retention strategy.

In summary, Alloway and Stockton (2008) argue that the current SRBMS is limited in its ability to accurately predict reenlistment, largely due to its reliance on historical data and a narrow set of influencing factors. A more flexible and data-driven approach could enhance retention outcomes by addressing the diverse needs of service members.

2. Barry: Marine Corps Lump Sum SRB Payment Analysis

Barry (2001) explored the transition within the Marine Corps from an installment-based SRB payment model to a lump sum approach, which resulted in an increase in reenlistment rates by approximately 5.8 percentage points among first-term Marines. The study provided a detailed examination of the benefits and drawbacks of each payment structure, highlighting the attractiveness of lump sum payments in providing immediate financial reward while also pointing out the limitations in terms of differentiation based on individual performance or qualifications.

One of the weaknesses of Barry's study is that it primarily focused on short-term retention impacts and did not explore the long-term implications of the lump sum payment model on career development and performance motivation. Additionally, Barry's analysis did not consider the psychological impacts of lump sum payments, such as how individuals perceive the value of immediate versus deferred financial rewards. This gap presents an opportunity for further research to understand how different payment structures influence long-term career satisfaction and performance within the military context.

In summary, Barry (2001) highlights the effectiveness of lump sum payments in boosting short-term retention but underscores the need for further research to understand the long-term impacts and the psychological factors influencing retention decisions.

3. Freeman and Zerler: Cost-Benefit Analysis of Retention Bonus Programs

Freeman and Zerler (2016) conducted a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis comparing the Navy's officer and enlisted retention bonus programs. Their study found that enlisted retention bonuses were generally more cost-effective than officer bonuses, primarily due to the more flexible structure of enlisted bonuses that allowed for adjustment based on internal needs and external economic conditions. Freeman and Zerler emphasized the importance of strategically targeting financial incentives to specific qualifications and critical skills rather than applying blanket SRB allocations across the board.

However, a key limitation of this study was the lack of consideration for non-monetary incentives and their influence on overall retention, which may have resulted in an incomplete understanding of the factors that drive reenlistment. The study also did not fully account for the administrative and logistical complexities associated with implementing a targeted bonus program. Freeman and Zerler's (2016) findings suggest that future retention strategies should not only focus on cost-effectiveness but also consider the broader impacts of incentives on personnel morale and professional development.

In summary, Freeman and Zerler (2016) argue for a more targeted approach to financial incentives, highlighting the need for cost-effective allocation while also acknowledging the importance of addressing non-monetary factors that influence retention.

4. Park: Data-Driven Allocation of SRBs

Park (2024) expanded on the cost-effectiveness of SRBs by emphasizing the need for data-driven allocation. Park's study utilized advanced statistical methods such as survival analysis, logistic regression, and random forest models to optimize SRB distribution. The research revealed that demographic factors, service history, and specialized training significantly influenced reenlistment decisions, suggesting that a one-size-fits-all approach is not effective.

Despite its strengths in utilizing sophisticated data analysis techniques, the study's reliance on historical reenlistment data could introduce biases that may not adequately account for changing trends in personnel behavior and economic conditions. Furthermore,

Park's research did not explore the potential ethical concerns related to using predictive algorithms for personnel decisions, such as the risk of reinforcing existing biases or creating inequities in SRB distribution. Expanding on these ethical considerations would provide a more balanced perspective on the benefits and limitations of data-driven SRB allocation.

In summary, Park (2024) demonstrates the value of using data-driven approaches to optimize SRB allocation but acknowledges the need for further exploration of ethical considerations and the potential biases associated with predictive algorithms.

5. Asch et al.: Cash Incentives in Recruitment and Retention

Asch et al. (2010) conducted an in-depth analysis of cash incentives in military recruitment, reenlistment, and attrition. The study concluded that SRBs were effective in addressing short-term retention but were limited in promoting long-term commitment. The authors emphasized the importance of supplementing SRBs with career development opportunities and other non-monetary incentives to foster sustained improvements in retention.

One limitation of the study is that it did not provide specific recommendations on how to implement career development opportunities effectively, making it difficult to translate the findings into actionable policies. Additionally, the study did not explore how different demographic groups might respond differently to cash incentives versus career development opportunities. This presents an area for future research to understand how tailored incentives could be used to address the unique needs of diverse military populations, thereby improving overall retention outcomes.

In summary, Asch et al. (2010) highlight the short-term effectiveness of SRBs while advocating for a more comprehensive approach that includes non-monetary incentives and career development opportunities to improve long-term retention.

6. Carrell and West: Qualification-Based Pay Systems

Carrell and West (2007) examined the impact of qualification-based pay systems on military retention. Their research highlighted that qualification-based pay systems foster

a sense of fairness and recognition among military personnel, leading to higher morale and sustained commitment. Moreover, coupling these incentives with SRBs has shown to create a synergistic effect, amplifying retention rates among highly skilled individuals.

However, Carrell and West's 2007 study primary weakness lies in its limited scope, as it focused predominantly on Army personnel, which may not be fully applicable to other branches such as the Navy, where roles and qualification criteria differ significantly. Furthermore, the study did not account for the potential administrative burden associated with tracking and managing qualification-based pay systems. This oversight suggests the need for further research into the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of implementing such systems across different branches of the military.

In summary, Carrell and West (2007) demonstrate that qualification-based pay can enhance retention by fostering fairness and recognition, but further research is needed to explore its applicability and feasibility across different military branches.

7. Hahn: Auction Mechanisms for Allocating Non-Monetary Incentives

Hahn (2010) introduced an innovative perspective on retention through the use of combinatorial auction mechanisms to allocate non-monetary incentives (NMIs). The study proposed the Combinatorial Retention Auction Mechanism (CRAM), which allows service members to select NMIs tailored to their personal preferences, such as cash bonuses, educational opportunities, and geographic assignments. Hahn's findings demonstrated that using auction mechanisms to allocate NMIs led to greater satisfaction and significant cost savings compared to traditional methods.

A limitation of Hahn's 2010 study is the complexity of implementing auction-based mechanisms in a military environment, as the administrative burden and the need for specialized knowledge may hinder widespread adoption. Moreover, the study did not explore how service members' preferences might change over time, which could affect the stability and effectiveness of NMIs allocated through CRAM. Future research could focus on developing more adaptive auction mechanisms that account for changing individual preferences and operational requirements.

In summary, Hahn (2010) presents a novel approach to retention through auction-based mechanisms, highlighting cost savings and increased satisfaction, but acknowledges challenges in implementation and the need for adaptability.

8. Zimmerman: CRAM vs. Traditional Retention Mechanisms

Zimmerman (2008) expanded on Hahn's work by comparing CRAM to other traditional retention mechanisms, such as purely monetary auctions and Universal Incentive Packages (UIP). Zimmerman found that CRAM significantly outperformed these traditional approaches, achieving cost savings of 25–80% while allowing service members to personalize their incentive packages. This individualized approach aligns with the need for a retention strategy that addresses both financial and personal factors, improving satisfaction and ultimately enhancing retention.

One key weakness in Zimmerman's (2008) study was the limited sample size, which may impact the generalizability of the findings to the broader military population. Additionally, the study did not address the potential challenges of scaling CRAM to larger military units or across different branches. Exploring these scalability issues and identifying best practices for implementation would be valuable for determining the broader applicability of CRAM as a retention tool.

In summary, Zimmerman (2008) highlights the advantages of CRAM over traditional retention methods, emphasizing cost savings and personalization, but also identifies challenges related to sample size and scalability.

9. Runnells: Non-Monetary Incentives in Retaining Mid-Career Military Personnel

Runnells (2023) examined the role of non-monetary incentives in retaining mid-career military personnel, particularly those at risk of burnout. The study highlighted the importance of career development opportunities, work-life balance, and educational benefits in fostering long-term commitment among service members. According to Runnells, non-monetary incentives are crucial for creating a holistic retention strategy that complements SRBs and meets the personal and professional needs of service members.

However, one limitation is that Runnells's (2023) study did not quantify the impact of non-monetary incentives on retention rates, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness of these incentives in comparison to monetary bonuses. Additionally, Runnells did not consider how non-monetary incentives might interact with each other, potentially creating synergies or conflicts that could affect overall retention outcomes. Future research should explore these interactions to develop a more nuanced understanding of how non-monetary incentives can be effectively combined to enhance retention.

In summary, Runnells (2023) emphasizes the importance of non-monetary incentives for mid-career retention, particularly in addressing burnout, but calls for further research to quantify their impact and explore interactions between different incentives.

10. Wang et al.: Menu of Contracts Approach to Retention

Wang et al. (2022) explored a menu-of-contracts approach to retention, offering service members a selection of incentive packages based on their qualifications, career goals, and preferences. The study found that allowing personnel to choose from various incentive options reduced issues such as adverse selection and moral hazard, which are common in one-size-fits-all incentive programs. Wang's findings support the integration of qualification-based incentives with SRBs and underscore the importance of flexibility and personalization in retention strategies.

A limitation of Wang et al.'s 2022 study is the potential complexity of managing multiple incentive packages, which may require significant administrative oversight and create logistical challenges. Furthermore, the study did not explore how differences in individual preferences might affect the perceived value of the offered incentives. Future research could focus on developing decision support tools to assist service members in selecting the most appropriate incentive packages based on their personal and professional goals.

In summary, Wang et al. (2022) highlight the benefits of a menu-of-contracts approach in reducing adverse selection and improving personalization, but also point out the administrative challenges and the need for better decision support tools.

11. Ortiz: Effectiveness of Non-Monetary Incentives

Ortiz (2023) analyzed the effectiveness of non-monetary incentives in combination with SRBs to retain specialized personnel within the Navy. The study highlighted that offering educational opportunities, family support services, and geographic stability in addition to financial bonuses resulted in higher retention rates compared to offering SRBs alone. Ortiz's findings align with the argument that a combination of financial and non-financial incentives is necessary to adequately address the diverse needs of specialized service members.

However, the Ortiz's (2023) findings are limited by the lack of a control group, which makes it difficult to isolate the effects of non-monetary incentives from other factors influencing retention. Additionally, Ortiz did not consider how the relative importance of different non-monetary incentives might vary across different demographics or career stages. Addressing these gaps would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how to effectively tailor non-monetary incentives to meet the diverse needs of Navy personnel.

In summary, Ortiz (2023) emphasizes the value of combining non-monetary incentives with SRBs to improve retention but identifies the need for a more nuanced understanding of how these incentives interact across different groups.

C. OVERALL ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE

1. Introduction to Retention Incentives in Specialized Military Communities

Retention of specialized military personnel, such as Navy Aviation Rescue Swimmers (AIRRs), is a complex and challenging endeavor that requires careful consideration of both monetary and non-monetary incentives. These specialized personnel are instrumental in executing high-risk, high-reward missions, which makes their retention critical for maintaining operational capabilities. Over the years, the Navy has employed various incentive strategies, including Selective Reenlistment Bonuses (SRBs) and career development opportunities, to keep these skilled individuals within the force. However, existing research suggests that relying solely on financial incentives is insufficient to meet the unique retention needs of specialized military personnel. Studies such as those by

Alloway and Stockton (2008) and Barry (2001) delve into the complexities of current incentive systems, identifying significant limitations and the need for more tailored approaches to retain these valuable servicemembers. In this chapter, we review a range of literature related to SRBs, cost-effectiveness of retention models, innovative incentive allocation mechanisms, and advanced data-driven approaches to retention. This review provides a foundation for proposing a refined incentive model that is tailored to the specific requirements of the AIRR community.

2. Selective Reenlistment Bonus (SRB) and Management Models

The Selective Reenlistment Bonus (SRB) has historically been a primary tool used by the Navy to improve retention among critical roles. SRBs are designed to provide targeted financial incentives to personnel whose skills are in high demand but difficult to retain. However, despite their broad application, SRBs are not without challenges. Alloway and Stockton (2008) conducted an in-depth analysis of the Navy's SRB Management System (SRBMS) and its associated ROGER model, which aims to forecast reenlistment behavior based on factors such as rank, years of service, and occupational specialty. Their analysis revealed significant shortcomings within the SRBMS, particularly in terms of predictive accuracy. Budget over-execution and the inefficient allocation of resources were cited as major concerns, largely attributed to a rigid, advocacy-based decision-making process that lacked the necessary flexibility to adapt to the dynamic needs of the force.

Barry (2001) explored the transition within the Marine Corps from an installment-based SRB payment model to a lump sum approach, which resulted in an increase in reenlistment rates by approximately 5.8 percentage points among first-term Marines. The study provided a detailed examination of the benefits and drawbacks of each payment structure, highlighting the attractiveness of lump sum payments in providing immediate financial reward while also pointing out the limitations in terms of differentiation based on individual performance or qualifications. Barry's analysis underscores the importance of adapting incentive models to better match the motivations and needs of individual service members.

3. Cost-Effectiveness of Retention Bonuses and Qualification-Based Incentives

Freeman and Zerler (2016) conducted a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis comparing the Navy's officer and enlisted retention bonus programs. Their study found that enlisted retention bonuses were generally more cost-effective than officer bonuses, primarily due to the more flexible structure of enlisted bonuses that allowed for adjustment based on internal needs and external economic conditions. Freeman and Zerler emphasized the importance of strategically targeting financial incentives to specific qualifications and critical skills rather than applying blanket SRB allocations across the board. This approach not only ensures a more efficient use of resources but also yields higher retention rates for high-value roles.

Park (2024) expanded on this approach by emphasizing the need for data-driven allocation of SRBs. Park's study utilized advanced statistical methods such as survival analysis, logistic regression, and random forest models to optimize SRB distribution. The research revealed that demographic factors, service history, and specialized training significantly influenced reenlistment decisions, suggesting that a one-size-fits-all approach is not effective. By adopting a data-driven methodology, the Navy could enhance its ability to allocate SRBs in a manner that reduces attrition and optimizes expenditures, ensuring that the most qualified and valuable personnel are retained.

Asch et al. (2010) conducted an in-depth analysis of cash incentives in military recruitment, reenlistment, and attrition. The study concluded that SRBs were effective in addressing short-term retention but were limited in promoting long-term commitment. The authors emphasized the importance of supplementing SRBs with career development opportunities and other non-monetary incentives to foster sustained improvements in retention. Asch (2019) further elaborated on this by exploring how a mixed approach of financial incentives combined with career advancement opportunities can lead to more substantial long-term retention outcomes, appealing to both the immediate and future career aspirations of service members.

4. Auction Mechanisms for Allocating Non-Monetary Incentives

Hahn (2010) introduced an innovative perspective on retention through the use of combinatorial auction mechanisms to allocate non-monetary incentives (NMIs). The study proposed the Combinatorial Retention Auction Mechanism (CRAM), which allows service members to select NMIs tailored to their personal preferences, such as cash bonuses, educational opportunities, and geographic assignments. Hahn's findings demonstrated that using auction mechanisms to allocate NMIs led to greater satisfaction and significant cost savings compared to traditional methods. This study also highlighted the complexity of non-additive relationships among incentives, suggesting that the perceived value of NMIs is often greater or less than the sum of their parts, depending on how they are combined.

Zimmerman (2008) expanded on Hahn's work by comparing CRAM to other traditional retention mechanisms, such as purely monetary auctions and Universal Incentive Packages (UIP). Zimmerman found that CRAM significantly outperformed these traditional approaches, achieving cost savings of 25–80% while allowing service members to personalize their incentive packages. This individualized approach aligns with the need for a retention strategy that addresses both financial and personal factors, improving satisfaction and ultimately enhancing retention.

5. Challenges in Predicting Retention and Allocation of SRBs

One of the primary challenges with SRBs is accurately predicting their effectiveness for individual retention. Traditional models of SRB allocation often fail to adapt to changing fiscal and operational conditions, leading to inefficiencies and resource misallocation. Freeman and Zerler (2016) highlighted the limitations of traditional SRB models, including budget over-execution and reallocation of funds from other essential programs. Alloway and Stockton (2008) also noted that advocacy-based predictive models frequently led to issues with budgeting and retention outcomes.

Park (2024) proposed a solution to these challenges by applying machine learning models, including logistic regression and random forest algorithms, to predict reenlistment behavior more accurately. Park's study showed that incorporating these advanced models into the SRB decision-making process significantly improved the ability to target incentives

effectively, thereby reducing attrition and ensuring that SRBs are allocated where they are most needed.

6. Non-Monetary Incentives and Career Development

Runnells (2023) examined the role of non-monetary incentives in retaining mid-career military personnel, particularly those at risk of burnout. The study highlighted the importance of career development opportunities, work-life balance, and educational benefits in fostering long-term commitment among service members. According to Runnells, non-monetary incentives are crucial for creating a holistic retention strategy that complements SRBs and meets the personal and professional needs of service members.

Wang et al. (2022) explored a menu-of-contracts approach to retention, offering service members a selection of incentive packages based on their qualifications, career goals, and preferences. The study found that allowing personnel to choose from various incentive options reduced issues such as adverse selection and moral hazard, which are common in one-size-fits-all incentive programs. Wang's findings support the integration of qualification-based incentives with SRBs and underscore the importance of flexibility and personalization in retention strategies.

Ortiz (2023) analyzed the effectiveness of non-monetary incentives in combination with SRBs to retain specialized personnel within the Navy. The study highlighted that offering educational opportunities, family support services, and geographic stability in addition to financial bonuses resulted in higher retention rates compared to offering SRBs alone. Ortiz's findings align with the argument that a combination of financial and non-financial incentives is necessary to adequately address the diverse needs of specialized service members.

7. Implications for Policy and Recommendations

The literature reviewed in this chapter emphasizes the need for a more dynamic, data-driven, and individualized approach to Navy retention strategies. Freeman and Zerler (2016) suggest that financial incentives should be targeted based on qualifications and operational needs to enhance retention outcomes effectively. Similarly, Hahn (2010), Zimmerman (2008), Park (2024), Wang et al. (2022), and Ortiz (2023) advocate for innovative incentive allocation

methods, including auction mechanisms, machine learning, and personalized contracts, to address the inefficiencies associated with traditional SRB models. The proposed approach in this thesis aligns with these recommendations by integrating qualification-based incentives with SRBs. This mixed incentive model is designed to encourage individual skill development and professional growth while ensuring that the Navy's financial resources are used efficiently.

By adopting auction-based allocation of NMIs, leveraging advanced data analytics for SRB distribution, and offering flexible contract options, the Navy can create a more personalized and effective retention system. Such an approach would not only address the current limitations of SRBs but also enhance the overall satisfaction and commitment of its personnel, ensuring that highly skilled individuals remain in service to fulfill critical mission requirements.

8. Summary of Key Findings and Gaps

The literature reviewed in this chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of the current challenges and opportunities in Navy retention strategies. While SRBs have proven effective in addressing some retention challenges, their inherent inefficiencies and lack of personalization limit their potential. The studies reviewed—including those by Alloway and Stockton (2008), Barry (2001), Freeman and Zerler (2016), Hahn (2010), Park (2024), Asch et al. (2010), Asch (2019), Runnells (2023), Wang et al. (2022), Zimmerman (2008), and Ortiz (2023)—all support the notion that a more tailored, data-driven approach is necessary for effective retention. There remains a gap in understanding the long-term impact of combining SRBs with qualification-based incentives and personalized non-monetary incentives on specific communities like AIRRs. Future research should explore the long-term effects of these mixed incentive models and assess their scalability across different Navy communities.

The expanded literature review supports the core thesis argument that transitioning from a purely monetary SRB model to a mixed incentive system—one that incorporates qualification-based pay and non-monetary incentives—can address the retention challenges faced by the AIRR community and potentially improve overall Navy retention outcomes.

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III. WHAT IS REQUIRED TO DEVELOP A NAVY SEARCH AND RESCUE SWIMMER

This chapter will discuss what it takes to develop an AIRR in the United States Navy. There are multiple factors that go into developing an Aviation Rescue Swimmer. This chapter will discuss required training tracks, base pay and allowances, degree of difficulty better known as attrition rates, and the value of experience within service members in the community.

A. DESIGNATION OF RATES IN THE U.S. AIR RESCUE SWIMMER COMMUNITY

In the naval air rescue community, there are two primary designations that an AIRR can go through. The first is a Naval Aircrewman Helicopter or (AWS). The U.S. Navy official website describes the AWS designation as operators of various aircraft in support of the below mission types: "Surface Rescue, Search and Rescue, Combat Search and Rescue, Naval Special Warfare, Airborne Countermeasure, and Logistics" (U.S. Navy, n.d.). These sailors are trained to ultimately be part of a helicopter response team, that can support the beforementioned mission capabilities.

The second pipeline that an AIRR can become is an AWR designation. While they may be similar, there are some differences in their mission types to include: "Anti-Submarine, Recon and Intelligence, Anti-Surface Ship, Search and Rescue, Combat Search and Rescue, and Naval Special Warfare Fire Support" (U.S. Navy, n.d.).

These two designators are important to note going forward, because they both have different training tracks for a recruit prior to arriving at their first squadron. In support of our thesis, we were able to reach out to Naval Air Training Command and receive their Updated Air USN Aircrew training pipeline for both designations (see Figures 1 and 2).

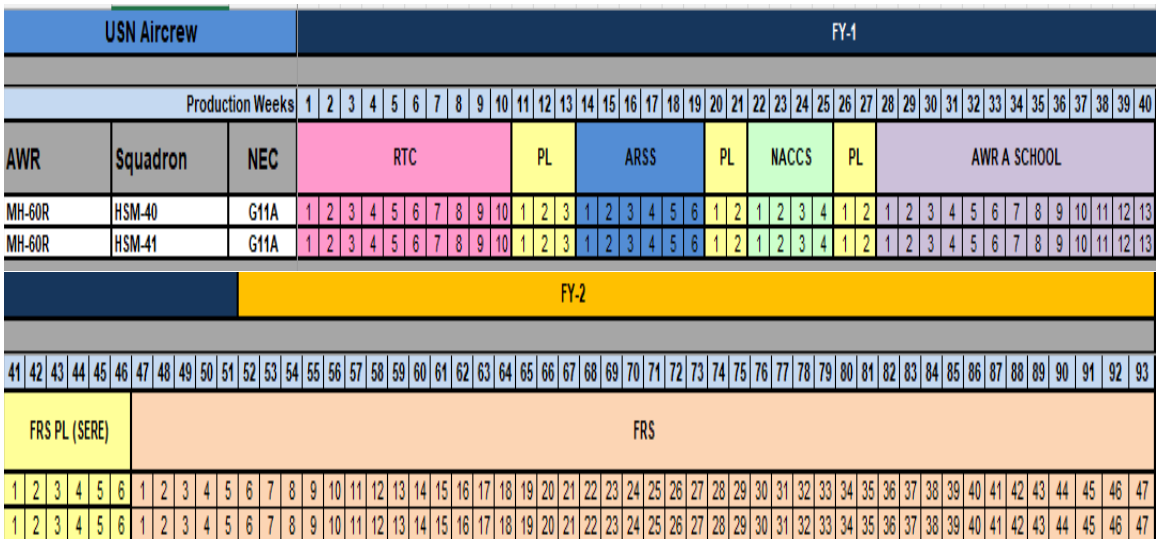

Figure 1. AWR Training Pipeline from Naval Air Training Command. Source: J. Husband (personal communication, August 8, 2024).

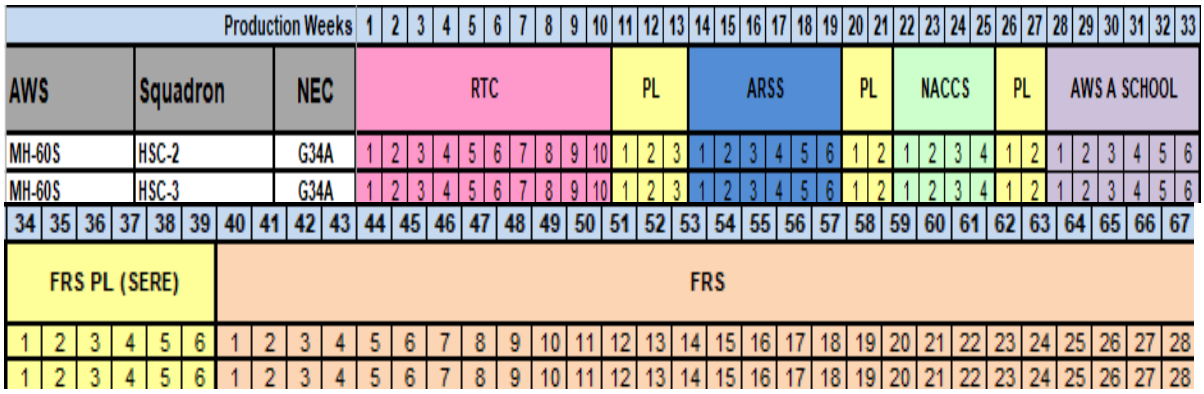

Figure 2. AWS Training Pipeline from Naval Air Training Command. Source: J. Husband (personal communication, August 8, 2024).

B. TRAINING PIPELINE

A new sailor needs to go through a variety of schools but both pathways start at Recruit Training Command (RTC) located in Great Lakes, IL, otherwise commonly known as bootcamp for enlisted sailors. This process takes roughly ten weeks to complete and is the starting point for any recruit heading into the Navy. Following RTC sailors will then go

through a three-week preparatory course known as preload. This school prepares candidates for the physical challenges they will endure in ARSS.

Following preload preparatory school, candidates will then go to ARSS for six weeks in Pensacola, FL. Here candidates will learn the core Search and Rescue techniques required for their designation. Following ARSS sailors will enroll in Navy Aircrew Candidate School (NACCS) followed by another preload for a total of six weeks of training in Pensacola, FL. These six weeks are designed to further develop new recruits in the techniques and core skills of an aircrewman (U.S. Navy, n.d.).

The next courses a candidate will go to are either their AWR or AWS Class A Technical School located in Pensacola, FL. These schools typically are 13 weeks long for AWR candidates and six weeks long for AWS candidates and are designed to further develop the technical skills required for each designation. Following their technical training courses both AWR and AWS candidates will enroll in Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape School for six weeks. This is commonly referred to as SERE school which is in either North Island, CA or Portsmouth, NH according to the official U.S. Navy Training website (U.S. Navy, n.d.).

The last training stop an AWR or AWS candidate will go to prior to reporting to their ultimate duty station is Fleet Replacement Squadrons (FRS). An AWR candidate will be attached to FRS for roughly 47 weeks vice 28 weeks for an AWS candidate. According to Navy Air Training website, "FRS location is dependent on aircrew rating in one of five locations (Jacksonville, FL, Norfolk, VA, San Diego, CA, Oklahoma City, OK, Ft Worth, TX) for basic flight and aircraft weapons systems training" (U.S. Navy, n.d.).

Overall, the training pipelines for both AWS and AWR candidates are both lengthy and extensive, spanning over two fiscal years' worth of training. An AWR candidate from bootcamp through FRS is roughly 93 weeks total, while an AWS candidate is 67 weeks long (J. Husband, personal communication, August 8, 2024).

C. NAVAL AIR RESCUE SWIMMER SCHOOL ATTRITION RATE

As previously discussed, the training pipeline required to develop an Air Rescue Swimmer is lengthy and highly demanding for a potential recruit. Each recruit must pass each individual course to be eligible to enter the U.S. fleet as a fully qualified Air Rescue Swimmer. In conducting our research, we discovered one school with an alarming attrition rate in the Air Rescue Swimmer School in Pensacola, FL. According to the NASC Unclassified Brief, as of August 2024 ARSS has a 47.2% overall attrition rate for fiscal year 2024 (J. Frank, personal communication, August 20, 2024). NASC has also attributed 59% of overall attrition in FY 24 due to a drop on request from air candidates (refer to Figure 3).

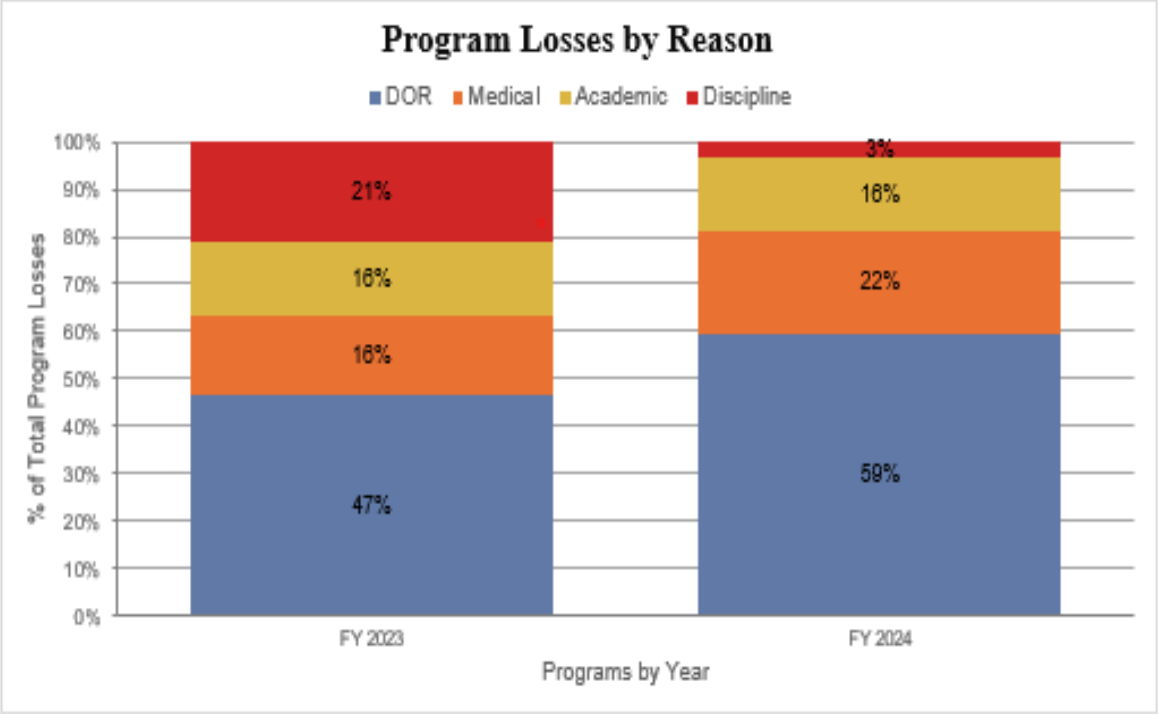

Figure 3. Naval Aviation Schools Command AIRR/ARSS Attrition Facts. Source: J. Frank (personal communication, August 20, 2024).

This is a 12% increase from FY 2023 which was estimated to be 47% of total attrition from ARSS. Furthermore, NASC has annotated the DOR as, "the highest it has ever been in recorded data" (J. Frank, personal communication, August 20, 2024).

This is an alarming number, but as previously detailed ARSS school in conducted 14 weeks into a new recruits training pipeline. The NASC brief also entailed some changes being developed to address the attrition rates. One proposed change was to introduce a pilot 4 weeklong SRSS prep course prior to a candidate's arrival to further prepare for the 6-week school. Another proposed change from NASC was to further work with the Navy Recruiting Orientation Unit (NORU) to better educate recruiters on the physical requirements of potential candidates for screening purposes (J. Frank, personal communication, August 20, 2024).

Overall, a 47% attrition rate for one school is an alarming number and demonstrates the risk associated with new recruitment. If a sailor fails ARSS they will be dropped from the training pipeline and must re-designate into another Navy rate. This is important to note in relation to the overall value of the fully trained Air Rescue Swimmers the U.S. Navy currently has in the fleet.

D. BASE PAY AND ALLOWANCES

There are also the financial costs to the U.S. Navy in the development of an Aviation Rescue Swimmer. There are multiple factors that go into the raw cost, starting with basic recruitment throughout the duration of the training cycle. This is calculated on the base pay of the recruits as they go through Recruit Training Command and subsequent training. The base pay of the recruit typically starts at the E-1 Seaman Recruit paygrade through E-3 or rank of Seaman. Figures for enlisted service members base pay are released each year via the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) per Figure 4 .

Cumulative Years of Service **(Note 1)**							
Pay Grade	**2 or less**	**Over 2**	**Over 3**	**Over 4**	**Over 6**	**Over 8**	**Over 10**
E-9 (Notes 2 & 3)							6,370.50
E-8						5,214.90	5,445.60
E-7	3,624.90	3,956.40	4,108.20	4,308.30	4,465.50	4,734.60	4,886.40
E-6	3,135.60	3,450.60	3,603.00	3,750.90	3,904.80	4,252.50	4,387.80
E-5	2,872.20	3,065.70	3,214.20	3,365.70	3,601.80	3,848.70	4,052.10
E-4	2,633.70	2,768.40	2,918.40	3,066.30	3,197.40	3,197.40	3,197.40
E-3	2,377.50	2,526.90	2,680.20	2,680.20	2,680.20	2,680.20	2,680.20
E-2	2,261.10	2,261.10	2,261.10	2,261.10	2,261.10	2,261.10	2,261.10
E-1 (Notes 4 & 5)	2,017.20	2,017.20	2,017.20	2,017.20	2,017.20	2,017.20	2,017.20

Figure 4. Basic Pay – Enlisted Effective January 1, 2024. Source: Defense Finance and Accounting Service (n.d.b).

If we were to take the base pay of a Seamen Recruit E-1 the costs would come out to $135,139 for the AWS 67-week training pipeline and $187,581 for the 93-week AWR pipeline (DFAS n.d.b).

Of note, these courses are over multiple fiscal years with considerations to federally approved military pay raises. There is also the consideration that the sailor may receive a promotion in rank over the fiscal year which would affect overall costs as well.

Other costs to consider besides basic pay are the entitlements the sailor receives as they progress throughout their training. A primary entitlement all service members receive is Basic Allowance for Sustenance, better known as BAS. As cited by Defense Finance and Accounting Service, "BAS is meant to offset the cost of food for service members. This allowance is based on the historic origins of the military in which the military provided room and board (or rations) as part of a member's pay" (DFAS n.d.a). There are also other entitlements such as Sea Pay and Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH); in the context of a recruit however, these would not apply until these sailors arrived at their first ultimate duty station.

E. OPPORTUNITY COSTS AND EXPERIENCE

After basic pay and monthly allowances there are more nuanced costs to consider such as the operational costs of the commands to house and instruct the rescue swimmer candidates. We must consider the costs of filling instructor billets to train and supervise these candidates. There is an opportunity cost here as well in the notion that the U.S. Navy must remove experienced AIRR from operational commands to fill these instructor billets. While we cannot give exact dollar amounts to the operational costs per day per schoolhouse, these costs are accounted for each fiscal year within the Department of Defense's budget.

Aside from pay allowances and operational training costs are the operational costs associated with training and developing an Aviation Rescue Swimmer over the course of their career in the Navy. How do we value experience in terms of cost? One metric to consider would be operational costs in support of an AIRR and their daily tasks. This ranges from the gear they wear during operations, to the refueling costs of the helicopters they ride on. Lastly is the cost of raw experience, a trained Chief Petty Officer of 16 years in service is much more costly than a recruit in the previous ways discussed. These costs however are what make that Chief an asset to the Navy. The dollar amount put into an AIRR with 16 years of service outputs an experienced asset that can provide operational expertise and value into the AWR or AWS squadrons they are assigned to. One metric would be in looking at the increase in base pay per rank, but that does not consider the operational value added to the squadron they are attached to. We can make the argument that an experienced AIRR with time in service has developed the qualifications, and mission expertise required to conduct a wider array of mission sets than a raw recruit. This value added in experience and qualifications could be rewarded through incentive pay structures detailed in the previous chapters.

F. CONCLUSIONS

The key takeaway from this chapter is to highlight how valuable each rescue swimmer the U.S. Navy has in active-duty service. Each time the U.S. Navy loses an AIRR they must find a replacement that can pass all the required high-risk attrition rate schoolings

prior to their arrival at their first duty station. It is not a one-for-one replacement however, due to the lack of experience in service time. We make the argument this is the main cost to the U.S. Navy.

This is the main driver the U.S. Navy needs to consider when reaching out to the Search and Rescue community regarding incentive structures to increase its retention rates. The real value of the community is and always will be in the experience of its sailors, through their years in service and subsequent experience gained. While we may be able to calculate the base pay structure of a new recruit, it is much harder to measure and replace the value of experience and expertise lost each time a sailor leaves the service. Retention and incentive structures must reflect this cost and appropriately scale to meet to requirements going forward.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. OVERVIEW

The primary focus of this thesis is to explore ways to improve strategies for retaining servicemembers within the United States Navy's AIRR community. Traditional tools such as SRBs have long been used to retain military personnel. However, this thesis proposes a shift toward a mixed strategy involving SRBs and qualification-based incentive pays, which could more effectively retain talented individuals. This chapter outlines the methodology used to gather and analyze data from a survey of AIRR servicemembers and presents both quantitative and qualitative analyses of the results. The survey focused on key areas, including satisfaction with the SRB structure, the potential effectiveness of qualification-based incentive pays, the value of non-monetary benefits, and the potential for implementing a combined incentive strategy to retain highly skilled sailors in the AIRR community and to provide a glimpse into effective retaining strategies for many other Navy designations.

B. SURVEY DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

To gather insights into the retention preferences of AIRR personnel, a survey was distributed to the AWS/AWR rescue swimmer community. All enlisted ranks were encouraged to respond. Regarding the survey, 328 active-duty service members responded, from a community of just over 1600. The survey consisted of three sections and a total of 25 questions designed to assess both quantitative and qualitative data related to their preferences regarding SRBs, qualification-based incentives, and non-monetary benefits. The following is a detailed list of the survey questions, the options provided to respondents, and the reasoning informing each question:

C. SURVEY DESIGN

1. SECTION 1

Are you currently serving on active duty?

Options: Yes/No

Reason: To confirm that the responses reflect the opinions of currently active personnel, ensuring relevance to the study.

2. Rank

   Options: E-3, E-4, E-5, E-6, E-7 and above

   Reason: To understand the distribution of respondents across different ranks, which helps correlate rank with incentive preferences.

3. Have you previously reenlisted?

   Options: Yes/No

   Reason: To identify how many respondents had the opportunity to reenlist, allowing comparison between those who have reenlisted and those who have not.

4. If yes, did you receive a Selective Reenlistment Bonus (SRB) at that time?

   Options: Yes/No

   Reason: To gauge how many respondents benefited from SRBs and to help assess the effectiveness and the prevalence of this incentive.

5. What are your plans regarding reenlistment?

   Options: Definitely reenlist, Probably reenlist, Undecided, Probably leave the military, Definitely leave the military

   Reason: To understand the general outlook of sailors regarding their future service plans.

6. Are you satisfied with the current SRB structure?

   Options: Very satisfied, Somewhat satisfied, Neutral, Somewhat dissatisfied, Very dissatisfied

   Reason: To assess the general satisfaction levels with the SRB structure and to identify potential areas for improvement.

7. If not, what changes would you suggest to make the SRB more appealing?

   Options: Open-ended in order to allow members to give free response.

   Reason: To gather specific suggestions from sailors on how to improve the SRB structure, reflecting their preferences and challenges.

8. Do you believe the current SRB pay structure effectively motivates reenlistment?

   Options: Yes/No

   Reason: To determine if the current SRB model is perceived as an effective retention tool.

9. If not, what type of incentive do you think would be more effective?

   Options: Open-ended in order to allow members to give free response.

   Reason: To explore potential alternatives to SRBs, including both monetary and non-monetary options.

10. How important is the SRB in your decision to reenlist?

    Options: Very important, Somewhat important, Neutral, Somewhat not important, Very unimportant

    Reason: To assess the weight that SRBs hold in the decision-making process of reenlisting.

11. Would you reenlist if no SRB or incentive were given?

    Options: Yes/No

    Reason: To measure the reliance on SRBs or incentives in determining reenlistment, reflecting the motivational power of these financial tools.

12. How familiar are you with the following monetary incentive pays?

    Options: Flight Pay, Hazardous Duty Incentive Pay, Special Duty Assignment Pay, Other monetary pay based on qualification level

    Reason: To gauge awareness of various incentive pays, particularly within the AIRR community.

13. How effective do you think these monetary incentive pays are/would be in retaining AIRRs?

    Options: Very effective, Somewhat effective, Neutral, Somewhat ineffective, Very ineffective

    Reason: To assess perceptions of the effectiveness of among the different types of incentive pays in retaining qualified personnel.

14. Would an increase in any of these monetary incentive pays influence your decision to reenlist?

    Options: Yes/No

    Reason: To measure the potential impact of increased incentive pay on retention decisions.

15. What qualification level do you currently hold?

    Options: Level 3, Level 4, Level 5

    Reason: To correlate qualification levels with reenlistment incentives and preferences.

2. SECTION 2

On a scale of 1–10, How much would a monthly pay increase, upon receiving one of the following qualifications, influence your decision to reenlist?

16. Level 3 (Capable of providing tactical leadership in requisite mission areas and demonstrates the requisite standardization and leadership to conduct level 2 and level 3 training) ($500 per month)

    Options: Promoter, Passive, Detractor

    Reason: To measure support for qualification-based incentive pay at Level 3 and how they might influence retention.

17. Level 4 (Qualified with an advanced knowledge of tactical doctrine, theory, and operational employment of the aircraft in all environments. Ground school required prior to designation. Capable of making ACTC designation recommendations to the CO) ($500 per month)

    Options: Promoter, Passive, Detractor

    Reason: To measure support for qualification-based incentive pay at Level 4.

18. Level 5 (Qualified Weapons and Tactics Instructor (WTI). Completion of SEAWOLF WTI course and receipt of 777A NEC required) ($600 per month)

    Options: Promoter, Passive, Detractor

    Reason: To measure support for qualification-based incentive pay at Level 5.

    Qualification descriptions for each level were cited from the AWS CAREER PATH (Naval Aircrewman Recovery Specialist) link on MyNavy HR website. (2023,

3. SECTION 3

19. What is the maximum amount you would be willing to forgo in your SRB (per year of reenlistment) to receive a (monthly) qualification-based incentive pay?

    Options: $0, $5,000, $10,000, $15,000, $20,000, $25,000 or more

    Reason: To quantify how much sailors are willing to sacrifice from their SRB for sustained monthly incentive pay.

20. How important are/would be the following non-monetary incentives in your decision to reenlist?

    Options: Choice of duty station, Education benefits, Promotion opportunities, Skill training/certifications, Family support services

    Reason: To understand the relative importance among the non-monetary incentives in reenlistment decisions.

21. What is the maximum amount you would be willing to forgo in your SRB for your preferred non-monetary incentive?

    Options: $0, $2,000, $4,000, $6,000, $8,000, $10,000 or more

    Reason: To assess how much value sailors place on non-monetary incentives by comparing them to financial benefits.

22. If offered the current SRB for your Zone, how likely are you to reenlist?

    Options: Very likely, Somewhat likely, Neutral, Somewhat unlikely, Very unlikely

    Reason: To measure the impact of the current SRB model on reenlistment likelihood.

23. If offered a combination of a reduced SRB (reduction of $20,000 for a three-year commitment) and increased incentive pay (of $500-$600 per month depending on qualification), how likely are you to reenlist?

    Options: Very likely, Somewhat likely, Neutral, Somewhat unlikely, Very unlikely

    Reason: To determine how appealing a mixed SRB and qualification-based incentive pay model would be for sailors.

24. If offered a combination of a reduced SRB and your preferred choice of non-monetary incentive, how likely are you to reenlist?

    Options: Very likely, Somewhat likely, Neutral, Somewhat unlikely, Very unlikely

    Reason: To assess the appeal of combining reduced SRBs with non-monetary benefits for retention.

    Conclusion: Thank you for your participation. Your responses are invaluable in helping us understand the best ways to support and retain Navy Aviation Rescue Swimmers. Please feel free to add any final thoughts that are pertinent to this survey.

    Options: Open-ended to allow members to give free response.

Reason: To understand factors outside of the surveyed questions that have an impact on retainment for the AIRR community and potentially other Navy designations.

D. CONCLUSION

The survey structure was specifically created to encourage feedback from all levels of the community by allowing for anonymity, quick completion, and opportunity to give free responses. The questions were designed to capture accurate feedback directly from those that the SRBs and incentive pays affect. The responses give both quantitative data and qualitative insights, providing a comprehensive understanding of the attitudes of AIRR personnel toward existing and proposed retention incentives. By properly analyzing the information collected, decision makers can more effectively and precisely retain talent and incentivize important skills obtainment throughout the AIRR rate and use similar tactics throughout the fleet to retain the best warfighters.

V. RESULTS

A. INTRODUCTION

The retention of highly skilled personnel within the Navy, particularly in the AIRR community, is a critical challenge that requires a deep understanding of the factors influencing reenlistment decisions. Reenlistment bonuses, such as the SRB, have long been a tool used to incentivize sailors to remain in service. However, recent data suggests that the current SRB structure may not fully meet the needs of many sailors to include AIRR personnel, leading to uncertainty and dissatisfaction regarding retainment of servicemembers.

By examining survey responses, this analysis aims to identify patterns in reenlistment preferences and dissatisfaction with the existing SRB system. The survey provides quantitative and qualitative data that sheds light to preferences within the community. Furthermore, the data reveals significant dissatisfaction with the current SRB structure, with many respondents expressing that the bonuses do not adequately reflect individual performance or qualifications.

In addition to financial incentives, this study also considers the role of non-monetary incentives, such as duty station preferences and educational benefits. While non-monetary incentives are valued, the findings indicate that they are unlikely to replace the importance of financial compensation in reenlistment decisions.

B. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

1. Reenlistment Preferences

Of the 328 respondents, 54.2% had previously reenlisted, and of these, 121 had received an SRB. Reenlistment intentions were mixed, with 39% of respondents indicating they would "probably" or "definitely" reenlist, while 37% were undecided, and 37.5% were inclined to leave the service. These numbers indicate considerable uncertainty among sailors about their future in the Navy, suggesting that current retention tools do not adequately address the needs of many AIRR personnel.

a. Satisfaction with the SRB Structure

A significant portion of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the SRB structure. Only 2.8% of respondents were "very satisfied," and 63.3% were either "somewhat" or "very dissatisfied." Figure 5 better illustrates the disparity between the satisfaction among AIRR members and their dissatisfaction with the SRB structure. This dissatisfaction is also seen in the open-ended structure of question seven in the survey, which shows that much of the dissatisfaction appears to stem from the perception that SRBs are inconsistently available and do not adequately reflect individual performance or qualifications. Furthermore, when asked, via question eight 78% of respondents reported that the current SRB structure does not effectively motivate them to reenlist, underscoring the need for a more targeted and equitable approach.

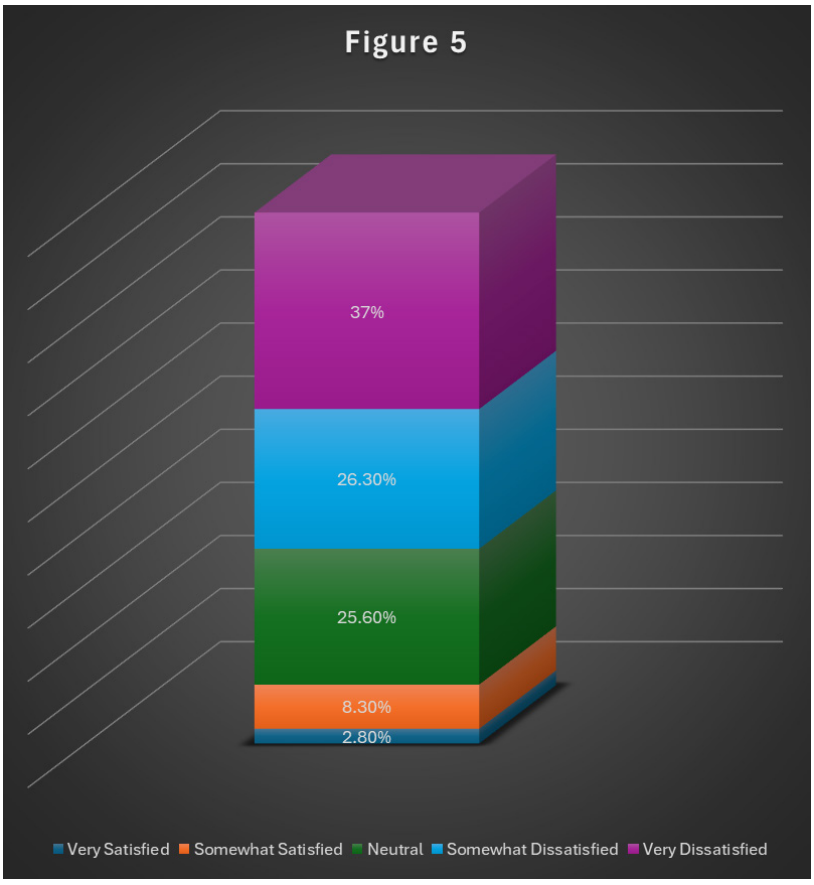

Figure 5. Survey Summary of the Disparity Between the Satisfaction Among AIRR Members and Their Dissatisfaction with the SRB Structure

There are only three Zones that are considered for SRBs, when available: Zones A, B, and C. Chapter 9 of Volume 7 in the DoD Financial Management Regulation (Undersecretary of Defense [Comptroller], 2024) defines the Zones as follows:

- Zone A: "Eligibility includes servicemembers who have completed at least 21 months but not more than 6 years of active duty."
- Zone B: For those who "have completed at least 6 but not more than 10 years of active duty on the date of reenlistment or beginning of an extension."
- Zone C: For those who "have completed at least 10 but not more than 14 years of active duty."

2. Specific Zone Analysis

According to Navy manning documents, the AWS and AWR communities are well supplied and manned for Zone A. This is done purposefully and is intended to counteract the loss of potential AIRR recruits as they go through rigorous trainings that have historically high attrition rates and is a Zone that has a focus of recruitment rather than retainment. Additionally, Zone A is not a primary retainment zone for AIRR due to the lengthy initial contracts, which typically take them into Zone B, that AIRR members commit to due to the extensive training periods per their rate specific training continuum and career path document (MyNavy HR, n.d.c). To properly calibrate retainment strategy efforts within AIRR the following analysis will look specifically at Zones B and C.

My Navy HR documents show the AWS community is manned at 80% for Zone B and 73% for Zone C (MyNavy HR, n.d.a), while the AWR community is at 81% for Zone B (MyNavy HR, n.d.b). These low manning levels in these Zones corelate with the E-4 to E-6 ranks and represent the bulk of the undermanned Zones. By focusing on the specific incentives that appeal to this group, the Navy can more effectively address retention challenges. The following charts (Figures 6 and 7) explore the biases within the E-4 to E-6 ranks concerning different incentives by further breaking down questions 22 and 23 and the specific responses from these ranks:

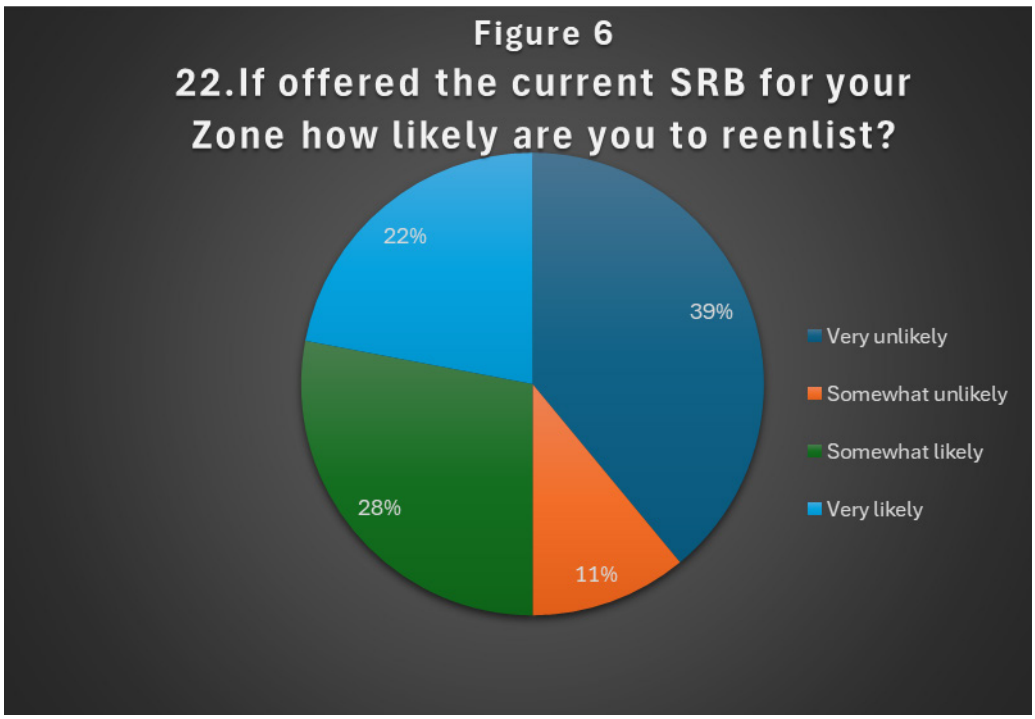

Figure 6. Survey Summary of Research Question 22

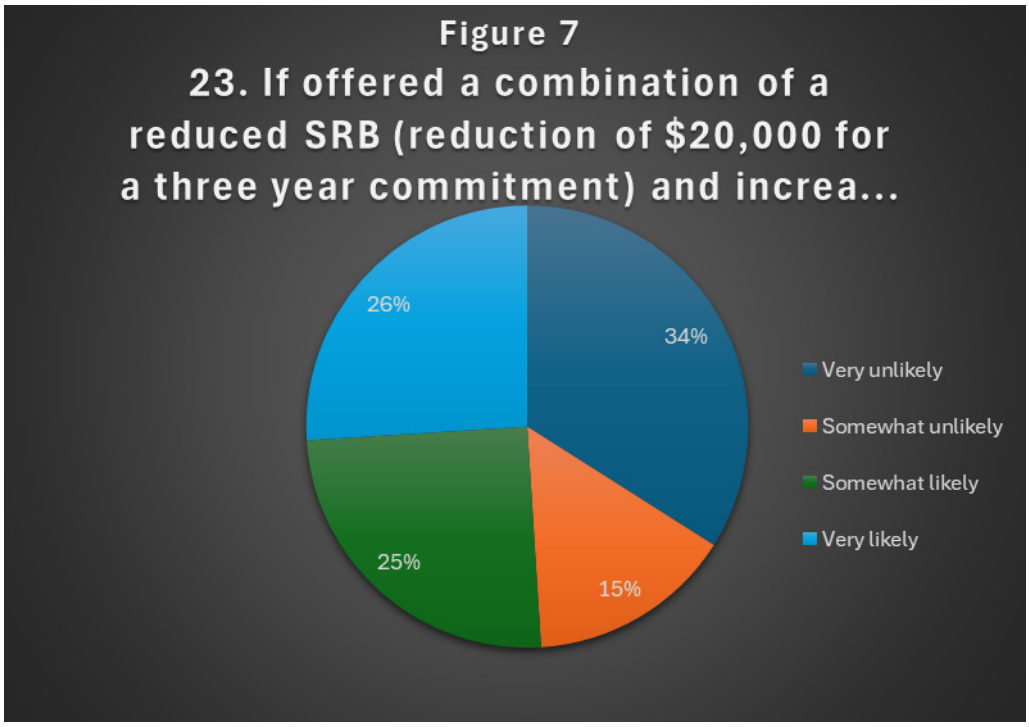

Figure 7. Survey Summary of Research Question 23

By comparing the two charts produced from survey responses to questions 22 and 23, excluding blank and neutral responses, there is a change in reenlistment likelihood. When offered a combined incentive structure (SRB plus additional monthly incentive) versus just the SRB, there is an increase in the number of respondents who are "very likely" to reenlist and a noticeable decrease in those who indicated they were "very unlikely" to reenlist. It is important to note the significance of this shift because the configuration of question 23's combined incentive proposal offer requires sailors to forgo $20,000 from their prospective SRB. If the SRB amount remained unchanged and was determined by the traditional SRB year group structure, while offering the additional incentive, it should be anticipated that reenlistment and retainment of skilled and needed personnel would increase.

This data underscores the potential effectiveness of tailoring incentives to match sailors' preferences, particularly in the undermanned Zones. The results suggest that combining qualification-based incentive pay with SRBs could significantly improve retention rates, especially among highly qualified personnel in the mid-career ranks.

3. SRB and Incentive Effectiveness

Despite the dissatisfaction with the SRB structure, financial incentives remain a crucial factor in reenlistment decisions. A total of 34.7% of respondents indicated that SRBs were "very important" in their decision to reenlist, while another 31.6% considered them "somewhat important." However, the survey also revealed that 207 respondents (64%) would not reenlist without an SRB or some other form of incentive pay, emphasizing the strong influence of financial incentives on retention decisions.

4. Effectiveness of Qualification-Based Incentive Pays

One of the central propositions of this thesis is that qualification-based incentive pays, a monthly financial incentive tied to specific achieved qualification levels, would be a more effective retention tool than SRBs alone. The survey results strongly support this hypothesis: 82% of respondents indicated that increased incentive pay would influence their decision to reenlist. Additionally, those holding higher qualifications, such as Levels 4 and 5, were more likely to view qualification-based pays as effective.

For example, 81% of respondents with Level 4 and 5 qualifications were promoters (6 or greater on a scale of 0–10, with 0 being "not likely at all" and 10 being "extremely likely") of a monthly incentive pay for the top level of qualification and the influence it would have in retaining them. This highlights that sailors who have invested time and effort into gaining advanced qualifications are motivated by financial rewards for their achievements.

To gather a transparent and more candid response regarding the potential of a qualification-based incentive on retention, respondents were asked how much of their SRB they would be willing to forgo in exchange for monthly qualification-based pay. Displayed in Figure 7 the results show that 54% of respondents were willing to forgo at least $5,000 or more annually from their SRB, with some willing to sacrifice as much as $25,000. This supports the idea that a reduction in SRBs, offset by sustained monthly incentive pay, could be an effective retention strategy, particularly for those who have achieved higher qualifications. There is further support and discussion on this within Chapter III of this paper, which discusses benefits to the Navy and AIRR community via a modified Cost Benefit Analysis; that dives into costs to train, equip and qualify a AIRR member.

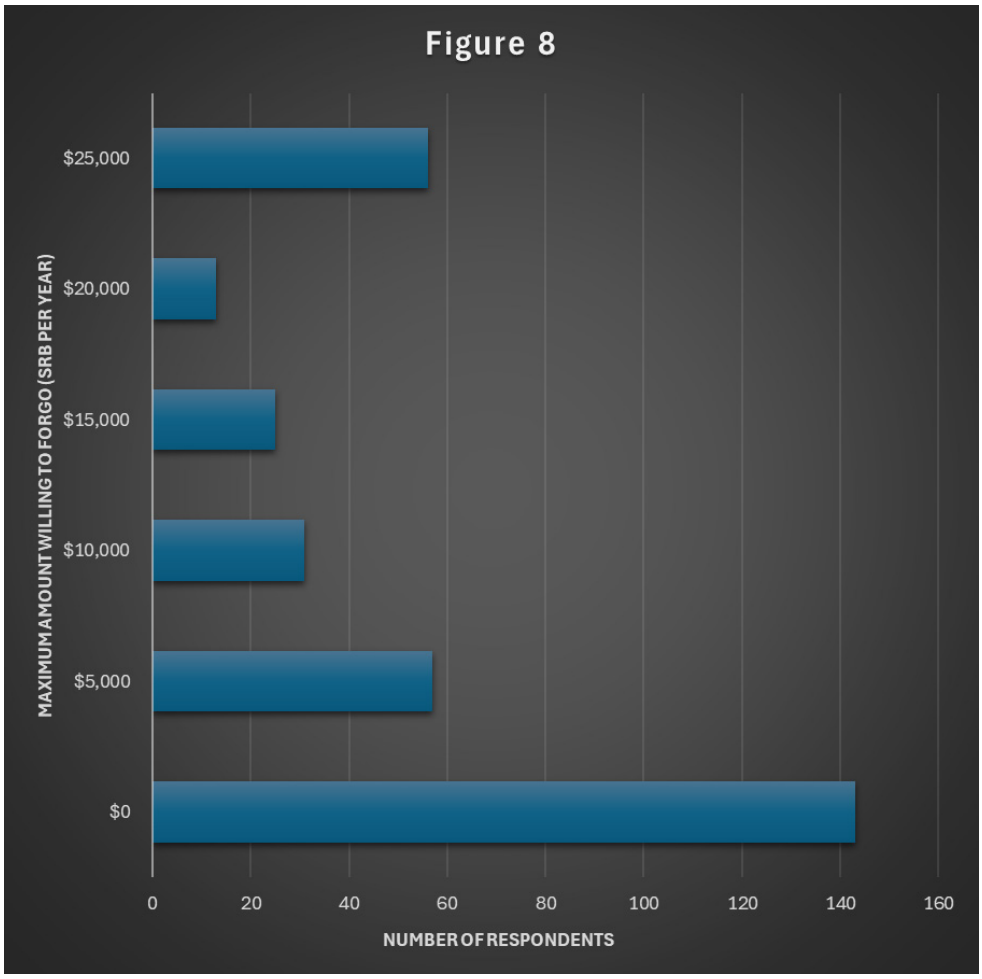

Figure 8. Maximum Amount Willing to Forgo

5. Questions 16–18: Impact of Qualification-Based Incentives on Retention

Questions 16 through 18 focused on determining how sailors viewed the impact of the current proposed incentive pay within the community. The information is shown clearly in Figure 8. The incentive pay would be tied to qualification levels and was used to gauge the impact it would likely have on retention decisions. The respondents were given a scale of 1–10 (1 being "Not likely at all" and 10 being "Extremely likely") to determine their preference regarding the proposed incentive and if it would influence their decision to reenlist. Depending on the response of those surveyed, members were put into one of three bins: promoters, passives, and detractors. To be a promoter of the incentive pay one had to choose a nine or greater via the given scale for the specific level of qualification, this

stringent placement in the promotors bin exemplifies the anticipated preference toward and effectiveness of a qualification-based incentive pay. Despite the strict settings of the scale Figure 9 illustrates the strong preference of the AIRR community. For Level 3 qualifications, there were 138 promoters and 112 detractors. For Level 4, there were 131 promoters and 116 detractors, while Level 5 had 140 promoters and 121 detractors.

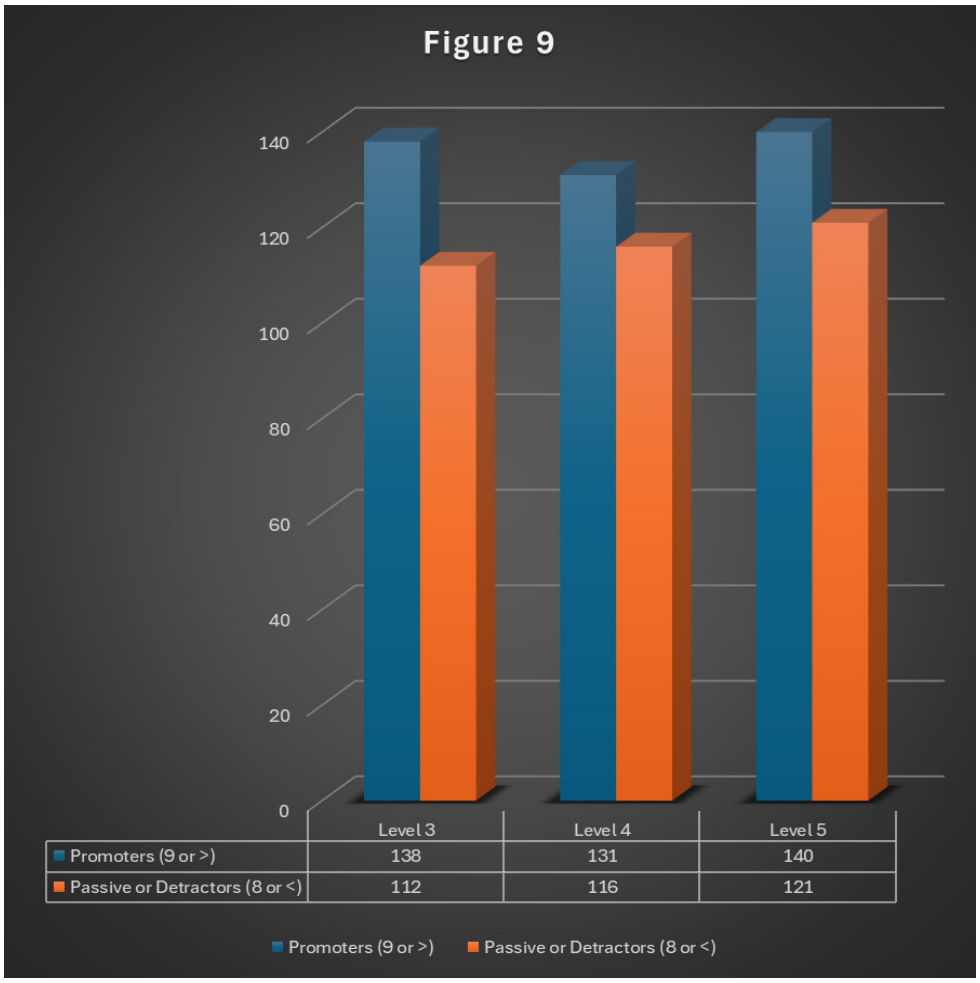

Figure 9. Survey Summary of Research Questions 16–18

Note: Most but not all respondents chose a scale number for each qualification level prescribed within the proposed incentive.

These results indicate that a significant number of sailors across all qualification levels support the introduction of monthly incentive pay, with the majority of respondents

promoting the idea. This is particularly important for retaining more invested sailors who show commitment to working toward higher qualification levels or have already shown commitment by achieving higher qualification levels. The data also suggests that qualification-based pay would be more effective at retaining these committed and skilled personnel more so than a blanket SRBs, which do not differentiate between those who have put in the effort to advance their skills and those who have not.

6. Non-Monetary Incentives

Non-monetary incentives were investigated in an attempt to identify factors outside money that may play a factor to retaining personnel. An example of this was the ability to choose duty stations, additional education benefits, and family support services, which were rated as important by 67.1% of respondents. However, when asked how much of their SRB they would be willing to forgo for non-monetary benefits, 55.5% of respondents indicated that they would not sacrifice any of their SRB. This suggests that while non-monetary incentives are valued, they are unlikely to replace the importance of financial compensation in sailors' reenlistment decisions.

C. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

1. Open-Ended Responses on SRB Structure

The open-ended responses revealed that many sailors felt the SRB system was unfair and inconsistent. A recurring theme was that SRBs were not always available when sailors were eligible, and some respondents mentioned narrowly missing out on an SRB by a matter of days. This led to feelings of frustration and unfairness, as SRBs are offered indiscriminately to all sailors within a given zone, regardless of their individual qualifications or contributions to the Navy. As one respondent noted, "The SRB structure doesn't account for the hard work that goes into earning higher qualifications."

a. Attitudes Toward Non-Monetary Incentives

While non-monetary incentives were appreciated, they were not viewed as primary motivators for retention. Several respondents mentioned that benefits such as educational opportunities or family support services were important but not sufficient on their own to

retain personnel. The overall sentiment was that non-monetary incentives should complement financial incentives, not replace them. One respondent summarized this sentiment by stating, "Non-monetary incentives are nice, but they don't pay the bills."

2. Comparison of SRB Dissatisfaction and Incentive Pay Preferences

A notable correlation was found between dissatisfaction with the SRB structure and a preference for qualification-based incentive pay. Of the 247 respondents who were dissatisfied with the SRB structure, 82% indicated that monthly incentive pay would influence their decision to reenlist. This suggests that a more personalized incentive system, one that rewards individual effort and qualifications, could help address dissatisfaction with the current blanket-type SRB model.

3. Discussion and Implications

The survey data provides compelling evidence that a mixed incentive approach, combining SRBs with qualification-based incentive pay, would be more effective at retaining motivated and skilled personnel. Sailors who have already demonstrated discipline and commitment by earning higher qualifications are more likely to stay if their efforts are rewarded with consistent financial incentives. Additionally, qualification-based incentives would help the Navy retain its most valuable personnel, reducing the need for frequent recruitment cost, cost of training of replacements, and inflated SRBs.

The survey also highlights significant dissatisfaction with the current SRB structure, which offers equal bonuses to all eligible sailors regardless of their qualifications or performance. This blanket approach not only leads to feelings of unfairness but also fails to motivate high performers to remain in the service. By implementing a system that rewards individual achievement, the Navy could reduce its reliance on SRBs while retaining the most skilled and experienced sailors.

The fact that a majority of respondents were willing to forgo significant portions of their SRBs in exchange for monthly incentive pay suggests that the proposed qualification-based pay structure would be both cost-effective and appealing. Additionally, while non-monetary incentives are appreciated, financial compensation remains the most important

factor in retention decisions. These preferences derived from the survey are depicted in Figure 10. A combination of an effective monetary incentive pay alongside the traditional SRB, to be used as a lever to encourage or discourage retainment rates, would likely be the greatest tools for retaining the most qualified and motivated sailors.

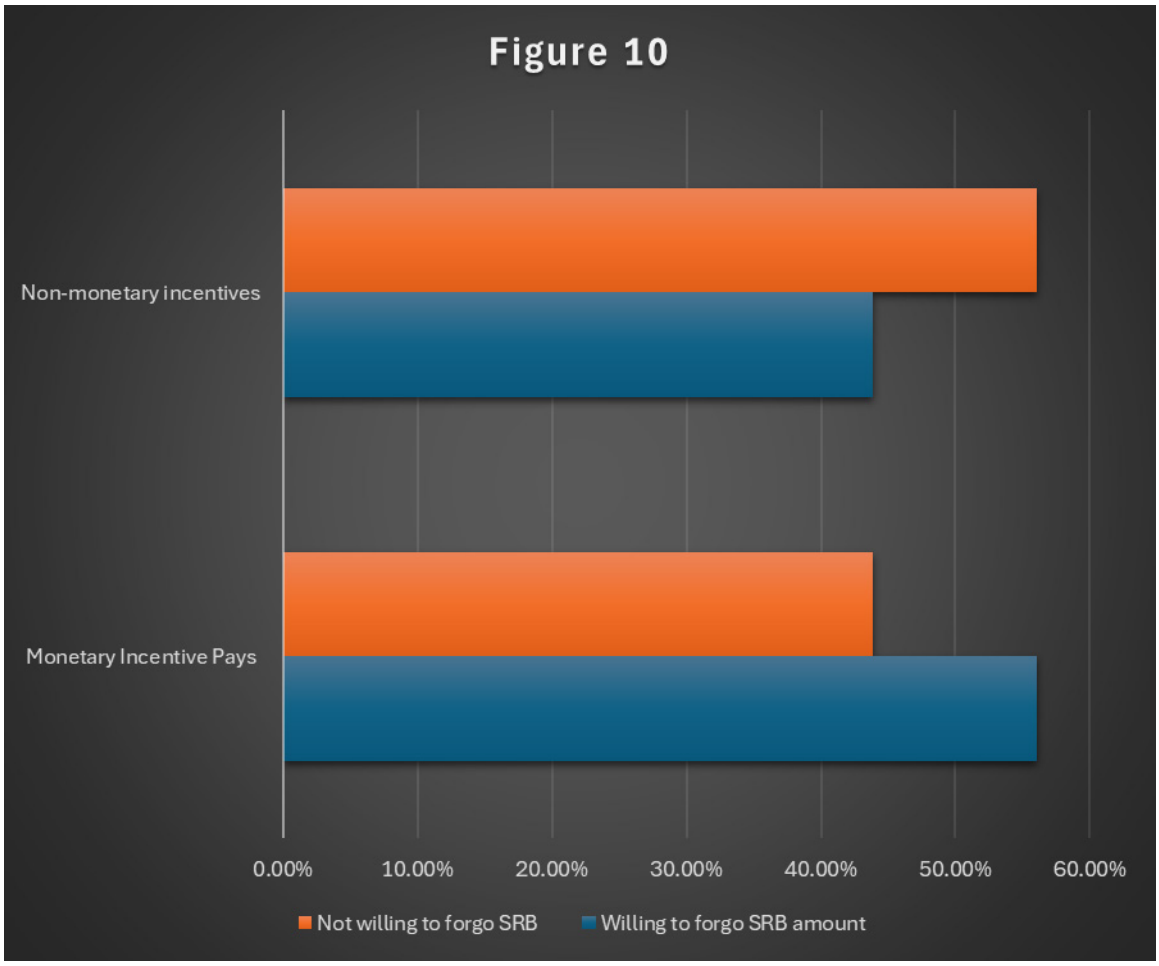

Figure 10. Preference of Monetary Vs. Non-Monetary Incentive

D. LIMITATIONS OF THE SURVEY

While the survey results provide valuable insights into the retention preferences of the AIRR community, several limitations should be noted:

- First, the survey sample is limited to active-duty AIRR personnel, which may not fully represent the broader Navy or other career communities. Additionally, the survey focuses on the preferences of the respondents and not the whole community. It also leaves out perspectives from newer sailors, which could provide a more comprehensive view of retention preferences and challenges for those currently in the training pipeline.
- Second, a significant number of respondents were undecided about their reenlistment plans. This uncertainty makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the actual effectiveness of proposed incentives in influencing retention. While the survey and analysis attempts to capture attitudes toward SRBs and qualification-based incentives, it does not necessarily capture many real-world reenlistment factors, particularly given the complexity of personal and professional factors influencing career decisions. For example, the survey does not account for external factors, such as family considerations, personal health, or broader economic conditions, which can heavily influence a sailor's decision to stay or leave the Navy. These factors, though not captured in the survey, are critical components of reenlistment decisions and may affect the reliability of the results in predicting actual retention outcomes. As such, the findings should be considered in conjunction with a broader understanding of the multifaceted factors that influence retention within the military.
- Third, the qualitative responses, while providing rich insights, are inherently subjective. The open-ended nature of these questions allowed respondents to express their frustrations and interpreting these responses introduces the potential for researcher bias. The subjective nature of qualitative data makes it challenging to generalize the findings across the entire AIRR community.

E. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the survey results strongly support the hypothesis that a combination of SRBs and qualification-based incentive pays would provide a more effective and equitable retention strategy for the AIRR community. The data shows that qualification-based incentives are particularly appealing to sailors who have achieved higher qualifications, as these individuals are more likely to stay if they are rewarded for their efforts. Furthermore, the current dissatisfaction with the SRB structure indicates a need for a more personalized and consistent approach to retention. By implementing qualification-based incentives alongside SRBs, the Navy can retain its most valuable personnel and ensure the continued success of the AIRR community.

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VI. CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FURTHER RESEARCH

A. CONCLUSION

This thesis emphasizes the importance of evolving retention strategies within the United States Navy's Aviation Rescue Swimmer (AIRR) community. The current reliance on Selective Reenlistment Bonuses (SRBs) has proven insufficient to meet the complex needs and motivations of sailors, particularly those with advanced qualifications. The data gathered from the survey highlights the dissatisfaction with SRB structures and the growing preference for a mixed incentive approach that includes both SRBs and qualification-based incentive pay.

The survey results show that sailors, especially those with higher qualifications, are more likely to reenlist when rewarded for their skills and efforts through sustained financial incentives. The willingness of many to forgo portions of their SRBs in exchange for qualification-based pay underscores the potential cost-effectiveness of this strategy. Additionally, while non-monetary benefits are valued, they do not outweigh the importance of financial compensation in reenlistment decisions.

By adopting a more tailored incentive structure, the Navy can better retain experienced and highly qualified personnel, which is critical for maintaining the operational effectiveness of the AIRR community. Ultimately, the real value of this community lies in the experience and expertise of its sailors, a resource that cannot be easily replaced. Therefore, the retention strategies must evolve to reflect this, ensuring that both financial and non-financial incentives are aligned with the long-term success of the Navy and its rescue operations.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve retention within the AIRR community, several recommendations are proposed to better meet the needs and aspirations of its personnel. These recommendations focus on enhancing financial incentives, providing career progression opportunities, and establishing a voice for AIRR members within leadership structures.

1. Targeted Incentive Pay

One effective strategy for increasing retention is to look at how other specialized communities within the Navy have structured their incentive pays. For example, the Special Warfare communities offer various incentive pays such as Parachute Duty Pay, Demolition Duty Pay, and others, which incentivize development of skills and performance of hazardous duties. The AIRR community can adopt a similar approach by establishing new incentive pays tied to specific duties performed by rescue swimmers. The proposed incentive pay, discussed in this thesis, focuses on door-gunner and tactical skills and many of these skills are closely related to and support some of the pays listed in the DODs Special and Incentive Pay Index. An example of this is the Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure (VBSS) operations pay. This is an area that the AIRR community supports and trains toward per the SEAWOLF tactics syllabus and would be a skill included in the proposed incentive as members gain qualification. These roles often involve high levels of responsibility and specialized skills, which should be financially recognized.

By implementing the proposed incentive or other structured, role-specific incentive pays, the AIRR community can better motivate its personnel to remain in service. For instance, providing a fixed monthly pay for specific technical expertise, or higher payments for particularly hazardous or specialized missions, would align the AIRR community's incentive structure with that of other successful Navy communities.

2. Career Progression Paths

A critical component of retention is providing career growth opportunities. The current structure for AIRR members forces sailors to leave their technical field if they wish to pursue an officer commission, which is a deterrent for those who value their technical expertise but desire a commission. To address this, the establishment of full commission opportunities to include Limited Duty Officer (LDO) and/or Chief Warrant Officer (CWO) within the AIRR community would provide expanded career growth opportunity, which would allow expert personnel to remain in their technical specialties while advancing to leadership positions. This is a common Navy practice for many Navy rates and is the goal, as quoted by Navy HR, of the LDO/CWO positions; "We will achieve and maintain the

highest degree of technical excellence within our specialties in order to ensure we are poised to continuously contribute to the war-fighting capability and readiness of Naval Forces." By providing this option, sailors can continue to advance, without losing the skills they have worked hard to develop. This career development opportunity will likely increase retention by giving AIRR members an avenue to progress while retaining the valuable technical expertise that contributes to the Navy's operational readiness.

3. Leadership Representation

Another crucial aspect of retention is ensuring that AIRR personnel have a voice in the decision-making processes that affect their community and their many trainings. Currently, there is a need for representation that can speak more directly and impartially with leadership to relay necessary feedback and advocate for the needs of the AIRR community. A position within the leadership structure, filled by an experienced LDO or CWO, could bridge the gap between junior sailors and higher command, ensuring that their concerns regarding training, retention, and career development are addressed. Having a dedicated advocate in the wardroom would again provide motivated sailors with clear options for career growth and help align community-specific needs with broader Navy goals. This representative could ensure that training, tactics, and other community concerns are adequately addressed at the highest levels, fostering a more responsive and supportive environment for AIRR personnel.

4. Restructured SRB

Lastly, to improve satisfaction with the existing Selective Reenlistment Bonus (SRB) structure, it is essential that the Navy enhance transparency and consistency in how SRBs are awarded. As feedback from AIRR personnel has indicated, many are dissatisfied with the current structure, citing inequities in availability and a lack of alignment with individual performance. By making the SRB process more transparent, personalized, and qualification-based, the Navy can better align financial incentives, within all rates, for sailors' contributions and achievements, reducing dissatisfaction and improving retention.

5. Navy Rescue Swimmer Warfare Device

To enhance retention and foster a stronger sense of identity within the AIRR community, it is recommended that the Navy create a distinct warfare qualification device for AIRR members. This device would symbolize the elite skills and dedication required to complete the challenging AIRR program, aligning with Navy tradition of recognizing specialized warfare communities. By providing visible recognition for their accomplishments, this device would boost morale, instill pride, and reinforce a sense of belonging among rescue swimmers.

The warfare device would serve as a motivational symbol, acknowledging the critical role of rescue swimmers in life-saving operations. It would encourage retention by making AIRR members feel valued and appreciated for their unique contributions. Moreover, this device would elevate the community's prestige, making it more desirable to remain a part of, while inspiring future trainees to strive for this mark of excellence.

In summary, the retention of AIRR members can be significantly improved through the establishment of targeted incentive pays, the creation of career advancement opportunities within the technical field, the inclusion of an AIRR representative in leadership, and a more transparent and equitable SRB distribution system. By implementing these strategies, the Navy can foster a more motivated, committed, and satisfied AIRR community, ensuring that it retains the highly skilled personnel necessary to maintain its operational readiness.

6. Reduce Costs through Incentivizing Advanced Qualifications Within Rates

Chapter III discussed the various costs that go into developing a Naval Air Rescue Swimmer. Many of these costs from basic pay to extensive training tracks apply to all rates within the Navy to different degrees. The primary cost to the Navy shared between all rates is the accumulated experience gained throughout the servicemembers career. The operational cost to the Navy to fuel and equip said sailor all contributes towards their total experience and operational knowledge received.

We can assume each service member will continue to evolve their tactical acumen through the attainment of advanced qualifications. This can be done as previously stated through in-rate warfare devices, specific in-rate qualifications such as dive pay, or flight pay. With each qualification the Navy needs to re-evaluate the cost of that service member leaving their time in service. To offset this increased value and potential cost, incentive payments tied to attainment of in-rate qualifications can be implemented.

Proper incentive payments reward advanced knowledge attainment and expertise within the community. The U.S. Navy can send a strong signal to its community through monetary rewards for qualifications. This will lead to more service members seeking advanced qualifications which in turn will help the service member attain promotion. Equally important, it will send a signal to the experienced sailors that the service values their experience through increased incentives. The survey data shows that monetary incentives tied to qualifications are a driving factor in their decision to remain in the service. Retaining experienced sailors across all rates is the primary cost to the U.S. Navy. Once a sailor leaves active-duty service the U.S. Navy must endure all risks, costs, and allotted time to replace said service member. This is why the U.S. Navy must reduce costs through qualification-based incentives throughout the fleet.

C. FURTHER RESEARCH

The following ideas for further research are based on the recommendations outlined in this thesis, which aim to improve retention within the AIRR community. While the recommendations are tailored to AIRR, many of these concepts could be, and in some cases have been, applied to other Navy communities facing similar retention challenges. These future studies offer the opportunity to delve deeper into the specific factors affecting retention, morale, and career satisfaction and how these factors can be or have been improved.

Readers interested in conducting in-depth studies on these topics could utilize many different techniques to collect useful information; such as surveys, interviews, and data analysis to measure the effectiveness of proposed or implemented changes. Research could involve the AIRR community directly or could be expanded to other Navy rates that may

benefit from similar incentive structures, career progression pathways, and recognition methods or have. Some rates may have already used some of the recommendations listed in the thesis and an in-depth study into its effect on the rate and retention rates could be useful in justifying further use in the Navy. By comparing results across different Navy roles, researchers can gain more valuable insights into the broader applicability of these strategies to improve retention across various specialized communities.

1. Impact of Qualification-Based Incentive Pay on Retention Rates

A future study could examine the effectiveness of post-implementation in introducing qualification-based incentive pays, such as the proposed tactical skill and door-gunner pays, in increasing retention within the AIRR community. The study could also look at past implementation of other incentive pays within specialized communities within Naval Special Warfare, Special Operations, or other technical communities to determine if the approved incentives did in fact raise retention. This study could explore how financial incentives tied to specific technical qualifications affect motivation and long-term service commitment, comparing retention data before and after the implementation of these pays and how the hypothesized improved retention reduced recruitment and retention cost.

2. Evaluation of Career Progression Pathways for Technical Experts

Further research could assess the potential impact of establishing Limited Duty Officer (LDO) and Chief Warrant Officer (CWO) pathways within the AIRR community. Once again, it would also be helpful to consider a rate that has already implemented this pathway option to consider its effect on retaining highly skilled individuals and the cost benefit that it created for the Navy in doing so. This study could more precisely evaluate how providing career progression opportunities for technical experts, without forcing them into non-technical roles, affects retention and job satisfaction.

3. Perception and Effectiveness of Leadership Representation

Another study could focus on rates that have established higher levels of representation and the impact it made in introducing a commissioned representative into the wardroom. The study could determine how the additional leadership improves the

quality of training and job satisfaction within the community. This would likely be a qualitative focused study but by conducting surveys and interviews data could be collected and this research could accurately assess how having a dedicated advocate within the leadership structure influenced community morale, training feedback, perceived representation among members, and ultimately its impacts on retention decisions. It could also investigate how effective this representation would align with AIRR needs and broader Navy objectives.

4. Restructuring SRB for Enhanced Retention

There are many studies on SRB and potential ways to improve the SRB structure. A research project could analyze and suggest a more modernized strategy on how a restructured, qualification-based SRB system affects retention within specialized and technical rates in the Navy. This study could investigate how increased transparency, personalized awards, and performance-based bonuses could be structured into an algorithmic scheme for easy use and lead to greater satisfaction with the SRB system and lead to higher reenlistment rates.

5. Cultural and Psychological Impact of a Warfare Device

A future study could explore the cultural and psychological impact of creating a distinct warfare qualification device for Navy communities. This research could evaluate how visible symbols of recognition, like warfare pins, influence identity, and morale by investigating retention rates prior to creation of a warfare device and the immediate effects it has afterward within military communities. It could also examine how the device affects recruitment and the perception of the community outside of the Navy and among other Navy rates.

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