

The Monkey Study, Mandatory Military Retirement, And Legitimate Humanitarian Assistance / Disaster Relief (HA/DR) / Public Health Post-Service Paramilitary Substitutes: Letter To The Editor

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Editorial

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I was an undergrad back in the '70s—practically an era when we chipped out our term papers on stone tablets and did our statistics on abaci and conducted our US Army ROTC airborne attacks riding pterodactyls while wielding clubs. That's when I first heard about **The Monkey Study**. A Teaching Assistant in an Intro 100 Level Psych course mentioned it to the class in passing. I am unsure whether it was real or the figment of very active urban legend imaginations. Nevertheless, it had a ring of truth to it.

Allegedly, scientists were studying just how much psychological stress humans could undergo before they died. Not being able to experiment on humans—though I am sure the scientists would have liked to—they opted for the next best primate thing: Monkeys, of course. Now, this supposedly took place in the '50s—well before PETA and any concern for animal rights.

So, they took a bunch of monkeys—not sure how many or whether they were Rhesus, spider, chimps, gorillas, or whatever—and put them in individual cages. They taught them a very elaborate Morse code that they would tap out on a bar in their cages; they were required on a cue to do so correctly within a specific time. If they got it right, they got food, water—whatever monkeys like or need. If they got it wrong, they got one heck of a non-lethal electric shock.

After three days, the monkeys had mastered the task to perfection—smart monkeys. Over many weeks, the scientists began throwing various monkey wrenches (no pun intended) into the experiment, making it increasingly demanding on the monkeys. For example, they decreased the time to get the task accomplished, or created loud noises, disruptive lights, cage shaking, and various other hassles for the monkeys. Then they threw in a random number schedule so that getting rewarded or punished did not seem to hinge upon what the monkeys did on their “one-bar keypads.”

So how many monkeys died? If you answered none, you are right. And they continued to perform with perfection despite all the stress.

The scientists decided to ramp it up even more, if that was possible. And over many days they went non-stop, 24 hours. The high Op Tempo was brutal and

relentless, and the monkeys were going absolutely-ape-**** crazy (no pub intended). But still they managed to perform to stellar perfection.

So how many monkeys died? If you answered none, you are right. And they continued to perform to standard despite all the additional, substantial heavy-duty and industrial strength stress.

The scientists were standing around, scratching their heads and perplexed; no amount of stress appeared to adversely affect the monkeys. They concluded that all they had managed to do was torture a bunch of poor monkeys, and that was not going to look good on their resumes. They decided that the experiment was a complete failure and a waste of time and money. So, they shut it down “cold turkey.” The monkeys got fed regularly, watered regularly—whatever the monkeys liked they received routinely—no matter what they did. Some monkeys even kept attempting to forlornly tap on their bars in their cages.

So how many monkeys died? All of them, and within three days after the experiment was abruptly closed down. Autopsies showed the main cause was circulatory collapse, but for some, it was a complete medical mystery.

I am unsure how this is relevant to Mandatory Military Retirement. I will leave that up to you, the informed readers of this essay. Nevertheless, how the monkeys reacted to their surrogate version of “Mandatory Military Retirement” is eerily reminiscent of all those Marine Corps Gunnies who, after 25 years of high-intensity, faithful and obedient service, were mandatorily retired—and within only a month later keeled over dead.

I was fast approaching my own Mandatory Retirement Date (MRD) after over 30 years of federal military service, and I asked a colleague who knew me well whether I should just quit the military “cold turkey.” His response was, “Jay, don’t! The military has become such a part of your persona and the very core of your being. If you left abruptly, no matter the circumstances, the shock to your body and psych would be so great, you would soon be dead.” My wife also said “don’t,” because I would not know what to do with myself; I would drive myself nuts—and worse, drive her nuts too.

I began to reminisce with dread about the Monkey Study I had heard about years earlier.

Long ago, when I transitioned from an enlisted servicemember to an officer, I invested in a copy of the Army Officer’s Guide [1], and I read it cover to cover. It cautioned that servicemembers’ careers are not forever in the interest of preserving a youthful service; sooner or later, a servicemember will have to face Mandatory Retirement. To paraphrase, “Servicemembers remaining in the military beyond normal retirement do so for the reasons they first found military life attractive. They have come to love the service life in that it transcends anything found in civilian life: inherent meaning, sense of greater purpose and calling, command structure, reasonable predictability, uniformity, prestige, rules, ranks and status, rituals, positive rewards, mutual respect, negative consequences dictating behaviors, intense training, and operations tempo.” **A word to the wise: Mandatory Retirement in general can be a cultural shock of great magnitude with catastrophic wide-ranging psychological and physical consequences.**

The rub is that Mandatory Retirement from federal military service is just that—mandatory. That is, on a certain pre-ordained birthday, you will have to retire—if not sooner for other reasons.

As a military planner, I wanted to be a “Smart Monkey” while accepting my destiny. I wanted to avoid the extreme negativity of being compulsorily thrown out and make a gentler and smoother transition. So, I began researching and seeking alternative surrogate substitutes for federal military service. I

found three acceptable and legitimate paramilitary organizations: an (Army) State Defense Force (SDF), the Coast Guard Auxiliary, and the Air Force Auxiliary. I have made a career out of Joint Forces, so I said what the heck and joined all three in succession.

The common threads for me among these paramilitary organizations are as follows. They wear military uniforms that mirror the federal forces and some issue Alternative Business Uniforms that mirror those of federal forces subcontractor consultants. They are equally unified with a sense of team spirit. They serve as legitimate augmentees / multipliers to their federal counterparts. They have transcendent military augmentation missions, **especially Homeland/FEMA Hazard Assistance/Disaster Response (HA/DR) and community service and public health**—and they are mission-focused. They have military-style hierarchies, “rank” structure with roles, insignias, military-esque customs and courtesies, official identifications and their own particular lexicons and acronyms. There are positive rewards and negative consequences regarding role performance. There are advancement and status qualification levels and prestige and pride for serving, inclusion standards, rigorous training, and physical appearance standards. They do mobilize for collective training, and they do deploy inside the U.S. for HA/DR operations. Most importantly, there is that sense of mutual respect and collegiality and fellowship often missing from civilian life. And there is the opportunity to work alongside familiar federal force members who are grateful for their support.

Nevertheless, they have some nuanced differences. Physical and age entrance requirements are less demanding. Their Op-tempo, though constant, is not as constantly intense. They are volunteer organizations. That is, members are not paid except in special circumstances where they may receive a per diem, or compensation for travel and billeting when on orders. They might (more in the case of SDFs) get a nominal daily stipend while on deployment or annual training (e.g., \$120 per day regardless of rank). Except for organizational equipment and facilities, members pay for their uniforms, accoutrements, personal equipment, etc. to perform their roles. Also, some of these organizations have nominal annual dues requirements (e.g., X amount of dollars, the CGAUX or AFAUX). I do not find these arrangements degrading; in fact, they are quite fulfilling because I “took” during my 34 plus years of federal service, for which I now receive a retirement pension with benefits. So, it is my turn now to give back, and this is how I am doing it.

I will report briefly on all three organizations and provide links for more information for those interested in wanting to be Smart Monkeys—no matter at what point they are presently in their military careers.

State Defense Forces (SDFs)

The day before I retired from the Federal Forces, I was instructing on behalf of West Point. Three days later, I joined an SDF at the same rank with which I retired. Sometimes former military members can get a “bump” in rank for joining SDFs, when they retired from the federal forces. The State Defense Forces replaced the old Civil Defense system for Disasters and National Emergencies. Title 32 of US Code Sec 109 affirms the right for states to legally maintain uniformed troops (i.e., “State Militias”) that are not part of the Federal Forces. Twenty-two states and Puerto Rico have their own legally recognized SDFs. (A Superior Officer in the Federal Forces once quipped, “So does each state with an SDF have a mini-Pentagon too?”).

SDFs can vary greatly from state to state. SDFs primarily train and provide a Homeland Security-style, operations-ready, uniformed crisis and disaster response and relief force for large-scale events in

support of civil authorities within their respective state jurisdictions. There are cases of SDFs supporting National Guard and Public Health services as well as very rare cases of volitional overseas deployments. Some SDFs are so high-speed, they rival their Federal Force counterparts. Some SDFs may have Mandatory Retirement that extends past that of Federal Forces. They are typically Army units, but some may have marine or aerial components. To find whether your state has an SDF, here is the contact link for the State Guard Association of the United States. <https://sgaus.org/contact-us/>.



Picture 1. The author briefing as a Medical Officer, Assistant G1 and Adjutant at a monthly Guard Drill at the Westheimer Armory, Houston Texas. Photo courtesy W01 Gregory Illich.

Coast Guard Auxiliary (CG AUX)

While with the Federal Forces, I served a tour as a Joint Forces Army Liaison to the US Navy and I am a proud graduate of Naval War College. I wanted to pursue a post-retirement marine paramilitary experience. Because the US Navy does not have its own Auxiliary, I joined the US Coast Guard Auxiliary (CGAUX). The CGAUX is the civilian uniformed volunteer component of the United States Coast Guard (USCG); it supports all USCG marine and aerial missions, except those that are direct law enforcement or military engagement. Like SDFs, the CGAUX SDFs train and provide a Homeland Security and FEMA-style, operations-ready, uniformed crisis response and disaster relief force to large-scale emergencies and disasters in support of the USCG and civil authorities. Annually, the CGAUX saves countless lives and assists substantial numbers of distressed boaters and provides safety instruction to innumerable students, at a massive cost savings and value added to U.S. taxpayers. They are a force multiplier for the USCG. They also directly support the USCG in the execution of coastal Search and Rescue (SAR) operations, marine safety, waterway management, and environmental protection—because they are local, they often know the complicated marine areas better than the

USCG, thus performing the role of military scouts. The CGAUX has units in all 50 states and federal districts. Retirement is a volitional choice of members. For more information and to find a CG AUX unit near you, here is the contact the National link for the CGAUX: <https://www.cgaux.org/>



Picture 2. The author at the Wings Over Houston Airshow (October 27, 2023) serving as a Recruiter for the Active-Duty Coast Guard and the Coast Guard Academy.

Air Forces Auxiliary (aka AFAUX / Civil Air Patrol--CAP)

While with the Federal Forces, I served a tour as an Army Liaison to the Air National Guard and I served as an Air Guard Officer for 18 months. I decided to round out my post-Federal Forces retirement by joining the Air Force Auxiliary—Sea, Air, and Land—Joint Forces. One force, one fight! You can join the AFAUX at one rank lower than where you were when you retired. After completing basic orientation, you can retain the rank at which you retired and can even advance. The Airforce Auxiliary is the legally authorized component of senior members who serve as supervisors, instructors, and operators to the teenage cadets of the Civil Air Patrol. They wear Airforce-like uniforms or Defense sub-contractor alternative uniforms while performing those duties.

The Civil Air Patrol (CAP) is a chartered federally-supported non-profit corporation that complements the United States Airforce at a substantial cost savings and value add. Nationally, the CAP is a major operator of single-engine aircraft for its missions, including flight instruction to its cadets and provision of non-combat emergency services such as HA/DR, and especially Search Air and Rescue. CAP is a substantial asset in this regard because, like the CGAUX, it is local, and members often know the nuances of the complicated local terrain intimately—again, performing the role of military scouts. The

CAP has five federally approved missions briefly summarized as: (1) developing aviation supremacy and encouraging public service and civic duty; (2) providing (paramilitary) education and training; (3) fostering aviation locally; (4) providing adequate HA/DR; and, (5) assisting the USAF with its non-combat programs. CAP has units across the United States and its territories. Retirement is a volitional choice of members. For more information, and to find a CG AUX unit near you, here is the contact the National link for the Airforce Auxiliary: <https://www.gocivilairpatrol.com/>.



Picture 3. The author at Ellington JFAB w/ the Ellington Composite Squadron Texas 98 Wing participating in a routine Radio Communications Network exercise.

Conclusion

Regarding retiring long-term service members, I once heard that the French government employs long-term (30-50 years) retired veterans of the French Foreign Legion for agricultural and public works projects while housing and feeding them in “Old Soldiers Homes.” Some of those retired former French Foreign Legionnaires are upwards of 90 years old. I then heard a US Army Colonel remark in response that the U.S. government comparatively does a really crappy job at retiring its long-term servicemembers; it basically just discards them and their Subject Matter Expertise, after they have dutifully and devotedly served for such a long time.

I decided to not wait for the U.S. government to suddenly have an epiphanic moment. I took control of my post-federal service career, while continuing to practice my own Subject Matter Expertise and doing a “pause for the cause” in my own way. I am sure there are many other paths forward. The paramilitary services I described were my choices to join in the interest of longevity and self-preservation; they help me constructively get my regular military “fix.”

I do not know whether I am necessarily a Smart Monkey. But after several years of Mandatory Military Retirement, I am still an alive and actively and militarily / community engaged monkey.

Nevertheless, my wife of 23 years thinks I am absolutely the craziest and strangest person she has ever known. As she put it, “Most people do everything they can to get out of it, and you do everything you can to get more into it. Most people absolutely hate it, you absolutely love it. Most people run away from it, but you run toward it.” But after all, from years of training and service, that is what First Responders have been hardwired to do by their very nature, right?

References

1. Crocker LP, 1977. Army Officer’s Guide (47th ED.). Mechanicsburg, PA; Stackpole Books.