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TIME TO TAKE ACTION: PILOT SHORTAGE IN INDONESIAN NAVY

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TIME TO TAKE ACTION: PILOT SHORTAGE IN INDONESIAN NAVY

AIM

1. The aim of this service paper is to analyze the issue of pilot retention in the Indonesian Navy. It will discuss the potential impacts of pilot shortage on Indonesian maritime component capabilities. As pilot retention is not a new issue at all and many other countries face a similar challenge, this paper will examine the perspective of the issue from the lens of both domestic and international. Every possible cause will be analyzed to address the problem effectively. Finally, it is hoped that this paper can provide information and some recommendations to the Commander of the Indonesian Navy Aviation Center and Assistant of Personnel to the Indonesian Navy Chief of Staff.

INTRODUCTION

2. The Indonesian Navy, as the backbone of the maritime component in the Indonesian Armed Forces, consist of elements, namely Integrated Fleet Weapon System (IFWS), constituted of warships, Marine Corps, aircraft, and naval bases. It is a Naval Aviation Center, the organ of the Indonesian Navy that has a mandate to manage naval aviation as well as the aviation personnel. The issue of pilot crisis has been being discussed for a long time and has come out with some solutions in the past. However, it did not sufficiently address the issue holistically. The issue still exists in the current days. Indonesian Navy operates a total of 74 airplanes.¹ The number of pilots is less than two times the total of airplanes.² Even though not all aircraft are in the operative mode, those numbers have depicted the crisis. In addition, the discussion of the shortage of pilots is crucial because it will disturb the flow of naval air operations and bring unfavourable effects to maritime component capabilities.

3. The paper will be structured as follows: firstly, it will discuss the main tasks carried out by naval aviation, followed by assessing the impacts of the pilot crisis on maritime component capabilities. Then, it will examine the causes of the pilot crisis from different perspectives, discuss the previous approaches in dealing with the matter, and discuss the possible future measures from domestic and international approaches.

DISCUSSION

Impacts To Maritime Component Capabilities

4. In supporting Naval tasks, the Indonesian Naval Aviation carries out six functions, namely: tactical air surveillance, Anti-Surface Warfare (ASuW), Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), transporting landing troops from ship to shore by helicopter, rapid logistic support, and maritime patrol. In regard to tactical air surveillance and maritime patrol operation, the task is employed by Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), the fixed-wing aircraft and helicopter. These air platforms act as forwarding air spotters to identify any threats ahead

¹ Alex Pape, *Jane's Fighting Ships: 2020-2021* (Jane's Group 2020)345.

² Data from Indonesian Naval Aviation Center.

friendly convoy. Maritime patrol aircraft have the capability to gather maritime intelligence, compile pictures and assess the information using onboard Tactical Air Command and Console (TACCO) up to 250 nautical miles from its position and relay the data through the link to friendly forces. This information will support the Maritime Component Commander (MCC) to build up the Course of Actions (COAs). Meanwhile, maritime intelligence gathering is routinely conducted through regular air patrol all over Indonesian maritime jurisdiction over the year. In present days, the capability of conducting real Anti-Surface Warfare (ASuW) is not yet achieved. However, the platforms to employ the task are ready, and it is still awaiting further research and development regarding what missiles can potentially be attached on those platforms.

5. Moreover, one squadron of Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) helicopters consisting of 11 AS 565 MBe *Panther* has the capability to conduct subsurface search operations by dropping sonobuoys and dipping sonar and destroying the contact by two torpedoes that are attached to the helicopter. As submarines are very difficult to detect, the role of the ASW helicopter will be essential to support friendly convoys in anticipating submarine threats. During amphibious operation, the troops transported via seacrafts to shore for the main landing and utilize the transport helicopters to move the troops to particular targets away from shore escorted by escort helicopters. The medium transport fixed-wing aircraft also carry out the duty to support the paratroop of navy special forces and marine corps.

6. Navy pilot crisis will, directly and indirectly, diminish the naval forces capabilities. The number of existed pilots is not sufficient to conduct proper operations. It is not a healthy environment in regard to aviation safety prevention programs to get the pilot overloaded with flying duties. The pilot activities are not solely to fly the aircraft. There are staff duties to be done at the office. Some others need to take a leave for refreshing. They also have the right to take advanced education for their carrier. Those matters make the operation officer assess and then prioritize the operation considering the safety, type of operation and not all assigned operations can be executed as per request from fleets. Hence, the maritime component lost its leveraging benefits from naval air operations. As described above, naval aviation plays many roles in supporting maritime components in operation. Hence, diminishing the number of naval air operations will reduce the capabilities of the Indonesian maritime component.

Pilot Retention and Production

7. The cause of the pilot crisis is identified as two factors: low pilot retention and/or low pilot production. Pilot retention is a recurrent issue not only in the Indonesian Navy but also US Air Force, US Marine aviation and Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).³ It is identified that several factors have influenced the decision of pilots concerning retention. The most tangible factor is the economic factor. The take-home pays for the Indonesian

³ "The Marine Corps Will Pay Pilots Up to \$210,000 to Stay in Uniform," accessed 16 January, 2022, <https://taskandpurpose.com/news/marine-corps-pilot-retention-bonus/>; "RCAF Looking Overseas to Fill Pilot Shortage as Commercial Aviators Stay Away," accessed 16 January, 2022, <https://toronto.citynews.ca/2021/05/09/rcaf-turns-to-foreign-pilots-to-help-with-shortage-as-commercial-aviators-stay-away/>.

Navy Pilot is relatively much lower compared with the commercial pilot. The average income is about half of the commercial pilot's wages and bonuses. As has been stated by Snodgrass and Maue, other motives are career potential and work structures.⁴ The airlines, on the other hand, prefer hiring military pilots.⁵ Military pilots are proven to have good quality and quantity of training.⁶ They have conducted various and complex flying experiences.⁷ In the early outbreak of Covid-19, many domestic airlines decreased their operational tempo due to the implementation of government policy by temporary closing many tourists' attraction places and implementing restrictions to commute between cities. However, the demand for helicopter pilots to join private companies is relatively stable.

8. The human resources management and psychology expert research stated that quality of life, training and development, and communication also influence the decision-making process to change careers.⁸ Those factors can be categorized under the job satisfaction factor. Job satisfaction means that the worker feels happy because the job and the environment in the workplace have met the expectation.⁹ Denko has opined that job satisfaction is related to multiple posting and deployments, operation tempo, lack of involvement and communication about a future career, leadership at the workplace, perception of discrimination system, and the quality of family life caused by work.¹⁰ In common, military personnel will experience the tour of duty and tour of the area during their service. The member, particularly, officers will not be in the same position for a long time. They move from one unit to another, from a city or country to others. The deployment can also make the personnel get mental fatigue when deployed frequently in the armed conflict areas. Also, the military is trained and mandated to be ready at any time for duty calls. This kind of operation tempo is considered another factor of low pilot retention. In terms of a future career, there is a lack of communication between the career manager and the personnel. It can make the personnel feel uncertain about how to plan their career and family.¹¹ Another critical factor is the leadership piece. The leader, such as Squadron Commanders, have the opportunity to take part to increase pilot retention. They can be a broker to communicate the interests and needs of their subordinates related careers to senior/ higher command.¹² They can create a comfortable workplace, so the member at least feels happy to do their job.

⁴ Brian E. A. Maue, "Why We Should End the Aviator Continuation Pay Bonus Program," *Air & SpacePower Journal*, 2008, 96-98.; Snodgrass, "Keep A Weather Eye On The Horizon," 78.

⁵ Rachel S. Cohen, "Air Force Grapples With Enduring Pilot Shortage As Airlines Begin To Rehire," accessed 16 January 2022, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2021/06/22/air-force-grapples-with-enduring-pilot-shortage-as-airlines-begin-to-rehire/>.

⁶ William W. Taylor, S. Craig Moore and C. Robert Roll Jr, *The Air Force Pilot Shortage. A Crisis for Operational Units?* (California: RAND Corp Santa Monica, 2000) 6.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Aaron Trodahl, "Reexamining The Us Navy Pilot Retention Crisis." (PhD Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 2020) 4.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Christopher Lee Denko, "An Inquiry into the Relationship between Pilot Retention and Canadian Forces Career Management Practices" (Master's Thesis, Royal Roads University, 2005), ii.

¹¹ Ibid., 3.

¹² Ibid.

9. Furthermore, the pilot production in the Indonesian Navy is relatively limited. There are three sources of the pilot. First, the officer graduated from the Indonesian Naval Academy. The academy educates, trains, and prepares cadets to be ready to be posted in the warships and marine corps. Hence, there is a lack of interest of naval academy alumni to join naval aviation. Another thing is that naval aviator does not have the same opportunity regarding a career as the ship officer to get to the top position as Navy Chief of Staff. They usually get an order to join the naval aviator, not their own interest. The average number of naval student pilots is ten people per two years. Another source is pilots trained by joint flying school recruiting from a high school graduate. The number is uncertain per year, between 2 to 10. The last source is from the selected non-commissioned officer. The number of these recruits is not many and is not conducted every year. Most pilot from the last two sources usually ends their contract between 5 to 10 years. In contrast, the former source is likely to continue their career until retirement.

Approaches

10. As pilot retention is a recurrent issue, there are approaches that have been done previously. The standard contract duration for the navy pilot is between 5 to 10 years. Some time ago, the organization pushed to extend the contract to a minimum of 15 years. However, it did not work because it decreased interest in joining the navy pilot. Lesson learned from US Air Force, it offers the operational pilot bonuses, incentives like the Aviation Career Incentive Pay (ACIP) and Aviation Career Continuation Pay (ACCP).¹³ This approach is to fill the pay gap between the military and airlines.

11. While US Marine Corps (USMC) offers ideas to renew the motive and pride as a military member and improve work balance.¹⁴ Increasing the pride and motive can be done through good and communicative leadership, mentoring, socialization, training and education. The leaders and senior officers are the keys to instilling a sense of pride. In order to improve work balance, the commander or operation officer should intelligently notice and communicate with the pilot concerning the flying task about who could be assigned and when. There would be rest time between deployment or assignment to prevent mental fatigue. The pilot can be given opportunities to train and educate for their development. In some cases, commanders or senior officers are not allowing their subordinates to get education for the reason which is not effectively communicated.

12. Another option to optimize pilot production is to recruit fresh graduates from private flying schools. Joining the airline is very competitive. The airlines prefer hiring an experienced pilot with a high flight hour than a new graduate.¹⁵ Airlines are reluctant to spend more money to train a new pilot. The Navy can create a crash military pilot program

¹³ Aaron Trodahl. "Reexamining The US Navy Pilot Retention Crisis." (2020) 8.

¹⁴ "The Marine Corps Will Pay Pilots Up to \$210,000 to Stay in Uniform,"

¹⁵ Yani Andriansyah, "Banyak Lulusan Sekolah Pilot Indonesia Nganggur, Ini Penyebabnya (Many Indonesian Flying Schools' Fresh Graduate Are Unemployed, Here Is The Cause)", accessed 17 January 2022, <https://www.brilio.net/ragam/banyak-lulusan-sekolah-pilot-di-indonesia-nganggur-ini-penyebabnya-2111230.html>.

by recruiting those pilots. It is kind of a crash program, not regular because it will rely on the availability of the newly graduated pilot and the operational needs at a time.

13. In terms of career management, Human Resources Manager (HRM) should establish communication with the pilot. They can provide a career roadmap that consists of a list of positions per rank level. It is better to inform the pilots at the beginning about the career plan, such as for five years ahead. Hence, the pilot has time to plan their life and family. HRM can also provide an opportunity to the pilot who wants to have experience of staff duty outside the squadron and later be able to return to operational duty. Career and personal development by training and education can be briefed ahead to boost morale and make HRM easily manage the personnel.

CONCLUSION

14. The crisis of pilots in the Indonesia Navy exists and is recurrent. The total number of Navy Pilots is relatively inadequate to conduct effective operations. Naval aviator is an element of the Indonesian maritime component that owns six functions: tactical air surveillance, Anti-Surface Warfare (ASuW), Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), Rapid logistic support, and transport landing troops from ship to shore, maritime patrol. Those functions are pretty vital to leverage maritime component capabilities. The disturbance of naval air operations will reduce the capabilities of Naval forces.

15. The cause of the pilot crisis is identified fall into two factors: low pilot retention and or slow pilot production. Economic is the most tangible factor contributing to the retention issue. There is a gap in income between military and commercial pilots. While at the same time, the airlines are very keen to hire military pilots due to their quality training and complex flying experiences. Job satisfaction related to the workplace environment, leadership style, operation tempo, frequency of deployment and career management are also considered as motive that provoke to change career. Meanwhile, pilot production is also a challenge in the Indonesian Navy. The three sources, namely officer from Naval academy, the pilot from Joint services flying school and non-commissioned officer are not sufficiently meet the requirement.

RECOMMENDATION

16. Indonesia's Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces should find a breakthrough to bridge the income gap between military and commercial pilots. The payment system of military and public servants is similar. Therefore, the salary of those is relatively similar. The Ministry of Defence should coordinate with the Ministry of Finance to separate the payment system for Armed Forces. Hence, the Pilot can get better payment.

17. Assistant of Personnel to Navy Chief of Staff and Commander of Naval Aviation Center as air human resources manager for Navy Pilot should produce career management policy. The career management policy provides a fair opportunity to aviators, especially

the Naval academy alumni, to be back to sea assignments. Hence, the aviators have the same opportunity to reach the top position in the Armed Forces.

18. Tour of duty and tour of the area should be communicated effectively to personnel to give them time to plan their life and family. Personnel has the right to be informed about their future career. If it is possible, provide them with an option of careers.

19. The deployment of personnel should be balanced with their right to have a leave and get personal development by training and education. It is not easy to manage the deployment rotation. However, planning ahead will make it possible.

20. One option to boost pilot production is recruiting fresh graduate pilots from private flying schools, where many of them are still unemployed due to the airlines prefer experienced pilots.

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