

THE MILITARY HIRING TOOLKIT

FOR AEA MEMBER SHOPS

Your Guide to Building a Military Talent Pipeline

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Section 1: The Problem You Already Know

You Can't Find Technicians

Let's skip the pleasantries. You're reading this because you can't find qualified avionics technicians. Your best people are getting older. The ones who retire aren't being replaced. The ones you do find often can't do component-level troubleshooting. And every shop owner you talk to has the same problem.

This isn't news. The AEA Rate & Labor Survey has documented this reality for years. When asked about their biggest challenges, shop owners consistently rank "finding qualified technicians" at the top. Not insurance costs. Not regulatory burden. Not competition. Finding people.

The Numbers Don't Lie

Boeing's Pilot and Technician Outlook projects a need for **690,000 new maintenance technicians globally over the next 20 years**. That's about 34,500 new technicians annually, worldwide. The pipeline isn't producing anywhere near that number.

Meanwhile, A&P schools graduate roughly 4,000-5,000 students per year in the United States. Many of those go to airlines. Many leave the industry within five years. The math doesn't work.

What You've Probably Tried

- Posted on Indeed and got 200 applications, 195 of which were completely unqualified
- Raised wages (which helped, but didn't solve the problem)
- Hired someone who "said" they had experience, then discovered they couldn't read a schematic
- Tried to train someone with no electronics background, then watched them struggle for months
- Poached from another shop and started a bidding war that benefits no one

None of these approaches solve the underlying problem: there aren't enough trained avionics technicians in the civilian pipeline.

The Solution You Haven't Fully Tapped

Every year, approximately **200,000 service members** separate from the U.S. military. Among them are thousands of highly trained avionics technicians who have maintained some of the most sophisticated electronic systems on the planet. They've troubleshot radar systems, communication suites, electronic warfare equipment, and integrated

flight controls. They've done it in deployed environments, under pressure, with zero tolerance for failure.

These people exist. They're looking for jobs. And most of them have never heard of your shop.

The disconnect is simple: Military avionics technicians don't know general/business aviation exists as a career path. They think "aviation jobs" means airlines or defense contractors. They've never heard of Part 145 repair stations. They don't know that the skills they used on a C-17 or F/A-18 translate directly to a King Air or Citation.

This toolkit exists to fix that disconnect. We've created a companion **Military Avionics Career Playbook** that we're distributing to transitioning service members, explaining our industry and how to get into it. This toolkit helps you meet them halfway.

Section 2: The Military Talent Pool

Who These People Are

Military avionics technicians are not general mechanics who happened to touch some wires. They are electronics specialists who completed intensive training programs and spent years maintaining sophisticated systems.

Here's what their training typically looks like:

- **6-12 months of initial technical school:** Unlike a weekend certification course, military electronics training is a full-time, multi-month program covering electrical theory, troubleshooting methodology, test equipment operation, and system-specific training.
- **Platform-specific training:** After initial school, technicians attend additional training on their specific aircraft systems. An F-16 avionics tech learns different systems than a C-130 tech, but both learn deep troubleshooting skills.
- **Continuous qualification requirements:** Military technicians maintain proficiency through ongoing training, practical evaluations, and certification requirements throughout their career.
- **Supervised experience before independence:** New technicians work under qualified supervision before being signed off to work independently. Quality control is built into the system.

What They've Actually Done

Depending on their specialty and platform, military avionics technicians have experience with:

- **Communications systems:** UHF, VHF, HF, and SATCOM radios. Many have worked with secure communications and COMSEC equipment.
- **Navigation systems:** GPS receivers, inertial navigation systems, TACAN, radar altimeters, and integrated nav suites.
- **Radar systems:** Weather radar, fire control radar, terrain-following radar, and synthetic aperture radar. Complex RF troubleshooting is common.
- **Electronic warfare:** Threat detection, countermeasures, and integrated defensive systems.
- **Data links:** Link 16, SADL, and other tactical data systems. This translates directly to cabin connectivity troubleshooting.
- **Flight controls:** Autopilot systems, fly-by-wire, stability augmentation, and flight director systems.
- **Displays and instruments:** Glass cockpits, HUDs, MFDs, and legacy analog instrumentation.

The Skills That Transfer Directly

The equipment names are different, but the underlying skills are identical to what you need in your shop:

Military Skill	Civilian Application
Technical manual interpretation	CMM, IPC, and installation manual use
Built-in test equipment operation	System diagnostics and BITE
LRU troubleshooting and R&R	Line maintenance and install work
Component-level repair (I-Level)	Bench technician work
Wire harness fabrication	Installation wire work
SATCOM and datalink systems	Cabin connectivity (Gogo, Starlink, Viasat)
Documentation and QA compliance	8130-3 paperwork, maintenance records
FOD prevention discipline	FOD prevention (same term, same importance)

The Intangibles You Can't Train

Beyond technical skills, military technicians bring attributes that are nearly impossible to teach:

- **Mission focus:** When an aircraft needed to fly, it flew. Excuses weren't acceptable. This translates to getting the customer's plane out on time.
- **Accountability:** Military maintenance is heavily documented. Technicians sign for their work. They understand that their name on the paperwork means something.
- **Working under pressure:** They've done complex troubleshooting in deployed environments, with limited resources, under time pressure. Your busy season won't faze them.
- **Teachability:** The military trained them to learn new systems constantly. They're used to picking up unfamiliar equipment quickly.
- **Professionalism:** They show up on time. They wear appropriate attire. They communicate clearly. These are baseline expectations, not aspirational goals.

What They Don't Know (Yet)

Military training doesn't cover everything. Here's what they'll need to learn:

- **FAA regulations:** Part 145 requirements, 8130-3 procedures, AD compliance, and STC paperwork are new concepts.
- **Civilian equipment manufacturers:** They know Collins and Honeywell from military contracts, but Garmin, Avidyne, and L3Harris civilian products will be new.
- **Customer interaction:** In the military, the "customer" was the mission. Direct interaction with aircraft owners may be unfamiliar.
- **Business operations:** Billing, parts ordering, customer quotes, and shop economics weren't their concern. Now they might be.

This is why CAET certification matters—it bridges these gaps with training specifically designed for Part 145 operations.

Section 3: Reading Military Resumes

The Translation Problem

A military resume will look like alphabet soup if you don't know what you're reading. When a candidate writes that they were a "2A5X3 maintaining LRU/SRU on C-17 GATM-equipped aircraft," your eyes glaze over. That's a problem, because that person might be exactly what you need.

Here's the blunt truth: If you're throwing out resumes because you can't understand the acronyms, you're throwing out qualified candidates. Take ten minutes to learn the basics.

Military Specialty Codes: The Rosetta Stone

Each service uses different codes to identify job specialties. Here are the avionics-relevant codes:

Air Force AFSCs (Air Force Specialty Codes)

Code	Military Title	What It Means for You
2A5X3	Integrated Avionics Systems (Heavy)	Full avionics maintenance on large aircraft (C-5, C-17, KC-135)
2A3X4	Fighter Aircraft Integrated Avionics	Fighter avionics (F-15, F-16). High-complexity systems.
2A3X5	Advanced Fighter Avionics	5th gen fighters (F-22, F-35). Cutting-edge systems.
2A9X3	Bomber/Special EW & Radar	Electronic warfare and radar. Strong RF troubleshooting.

Navy Ratings

Rating	Title	What It Means for You
AT	Aviation Electronics Technician	Core avionics rating. Comm, nav, radar, EW.
AT (I-Level)	AT - Intermediate Level	Component-level bench repair. Your bench tech candidate.
AT (O-Level)	AT - Organizational Level	Aircraft-level troubleshooting. Your install tech candidate.
AE	Aviation Electrician's Mate	Aircraft electrical systems. Pairs well with avionics work.

Army MOSs (Military Occupational Specialties)

MOS	Title	What It Means for You
15N	Avionic Mechanic	Comm, nav, IFF, flight controls on rotary-wing.
15Y	AH-64 Armament/Electrical/Avionics	Apache systems. Complex integrated avionics.
15F	Aircraft Electrician	Electrical systems. Good foundation for avionics crossover.
15E	UAS Repairer	Unmanned aircraft avionics/electrical. Modern systems experience.

Marine Corps MOSs

MOS	Title	What It Means for You
6317	Aircraft Comm/Nav/Radar - F/A-18	Fighter avionics. Radar and comm systems.
6323	Aircraft Avionics - CH-53	Heavy helicopter avionics. Complex systems.
6326	Aircraft Avionics - V-22	Tiltrotor avionics. Modern integrated systems.
6338	Aircraft Avionics - F-35	5th gen fighter. Highest complexity.

Coast Guard Rating

Rating	Title	What It Means for You
AET	Avionics Electrical Technician	Combined avionics/electrical. Fixed and rotary wing experience.

Decoding Common Resume Terms

Here's a quick reference for military terminology you'll see on resumes:

Military Term	Civilian Translation
LRU	Line Replaceable Unit - black boxes that can be swapped on the aircraft

SRU	Shop Replaceable Unit - components replaced at bench level
O-Level	Organizational Level - aircraft-level/flight line maintenance
I-Level	Intermediate Level - component/bench repair
BITE/BIT	Built-In Test Equipment - onboard diagnostics
TO	Technical Order - equivalent to service manual/CMM
TCTO	Time Compliance Technical Order - like an Airworthiness Directive
AFTO 781	Aircraft maintenance documentation - like your maintenance records
QA	Quality Assurance - inspection function
CDI	Collateral Duty Inspector - additional inspection qualification
PMEL	Precision Measurement Equipment Laboratory - calibration
COMSEC	Communications Security - secure/encrypted communications

Red Flags and Green Flags

Green Flags - These indicate strong candidates:

- "Supervised" or "trained" junior technicians - shows leadership potential
- "QA" or "CDI" qualified - trusted to inspect others' work
- "I-Level" experience - bench repair capability
- Specific mention of troubleshooting to component level
- Multiple aircraft platforms - adapts to new systems
- Any mention of training schools attended or certifications earned

Red Flags - Dig deeper on these:

- Only lists duties, never accomplishments - may be a paper resume
- Very short tenure (less than 3 years total) - didn't complete full training pipeline
- Admin or support roles only - may have been in a non-technical position
- Can't explain what they actually did in an interview - resume may be inflated

Section 4: CAET: Your Hiring Standard

Why You Need a Screening Standard

Here's the problem with hiring military technicians without a standard: you have no way to verify that their training translates to your needs. A resume says "avionics technician" but that could mean anything from swapping black boxes on a flight line to doing component-level repair of radar systems.

Military specialty codes help, but they don't tell you whether the candidate understands FAA regulations, Part 145 operations, or civilian avionics equipment. And you don't have time to figure this out through trial and error.

What CAET Is

The **Certified Aircraft Electronics Technician (CAET)** certification is an industry-developed credential specifically designed to validate workforce-ready avionics skills. Unlike academic certifications that focus on electrical theory, CAET covers what technicians actually do in Part 145 shops:

- Basic electricity and electronics fundamentals
- Aircraft electrical systems and power distribution
- Avionics systems: communication, navigation, and surveillance
- Digital systems, data buses, and software-driven avionics
- Cabin connectivity and inflight entertainment systems
- FAA regulations applicable to Part 145 operations
- Documentation and quality assurance requirements
- Troubleshooting methodology

Critically, CAET covers the **FAA regulatory environment and Part 145 procedures** that military training doesn't address. A military technician who completes CAET understands 8130-3 documentation, return-to-service requirements, and how civilian maintenance differs from military operations.

How to Use CAET in Your Hiring

Option 1: Require CAET as a Prerequisite

Include CAET certification as a job requirement. This filters for candidates who have already invested in transitioning to civilian aviation and demonstrated that they understand Part 145 operations. Your job posting would state:

"CAET certification required. Military avionics experience accepted in lieu of civilian Part 145 experience."

Option 2: Require CAET Within 180 Days (Recommended)

Hire based on military experience and require CAET completion as a condition of continued employment. This gives candidates time to complete the certification while earning a paycheck, while ensuring they develop the Part 145 knowledge they need.

Include this language in your offer letter and employee handbook:

"CAET certification required within 180 days of hire as a condition of continued employment. [Company] will reimburse certification costs upon successful completion."

CAET Costs and Employer Support

CAET is affordable enough that employer sponsorship is a no-brainer:

- **Online Training Program:** \$359
- **Certification Exam:** \$119
- **Total Investment:** \$478 per technician

For less than \$500, you verify that your new hire understands Part 145 operations and has validated baseline avionics knowledge. Compare that to the cost of a bad hire or months of on-the-job remediation. **This is the cheapest quality assurance you'll ever buy.**

Consider offering CAET sponsorship as a hiring incentive. Many military technicians are using transition benefits, but knowing that you'll cover certification costs demonstrates investment in their success.

CAET vs. Other Credentials

Credential	Focus	Usefulness for Hiring
CAET	Modern avionics, Part 145 ops, practical workforce skills	High - designed for exactly this purpose
A&P	Airframe and powerplant mechanics	Useful but doesn't validate avionics skills
NCATT AET	Basic electrical theory, academic	Outdated - being replaced by CAET
FCC License	Radio operation, not maintenance	Nice to have, not a hiring indicator

Section 5: What You Need to Pay

The Market Reality

You can't hire quality technicians with below-market wages. Period. If you're paying 2019 rates, you'll get 2019 results—which is to say, you won't get anyone. The AEA Rate & Labor Survey data shows what shops are **actually paying**, not what they wish they could pay.

Use this data to benchmark your compensation. If you're below these numbers, you're making the hiring problem harder than it needs to be.

Hourly Wages by Region (2025 Data)

WEST U.S. (AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY)

Position	Starting Avg	Top Avg	High End
Bench Technician	\$25.31/hr	\$43.50/hr	\$75.00/hr
Install Technician	\$26.19/hr	\$41.71/hr	\$75.00/hr
Instrument Tech	\$26.18/hr	\$44.67/hr	\$60.00/hr

CENTRAL U.S. (AR, IL, IN, IA, KS, LA, MI, MN, MO, NE, NM, ND, OK, SD, TX, WI)

Position	Starting Avg	Top Avg	High End
Bench Technician	\$23.33/hr	\$38.50/hr	\$47.00/hr
Install Technician	\$23.44/hr	\$38.02/hr	\$50.00/hr
Instrument Tech	\$25.75/hr	\$38.86/hr	\$47.00/hr

EAST U.S. (AL, CT, DE, FL, GA, KY, ME, MD, MA, MS, NH, NJ, NY, NC, OH, PA, RI, SC, TN, VT, VA, DC, WV)

Position	Starting Avg	Top Avg	High End
Bench Technician	\$22.40/hr	\$41.73/hr	\$50.00/hr
Install Technician	\$24.13/hr	\$43.96/hr	\$60.00/hr
Instrument Tech	\$22.50/hr	\$41.40/hr	\$48.00/hr

Annual Salary Conversion

Converting to annual salaries (2,080 hours):

Region	Starting	Experienced	Top
West	\$46K - \$55K	\$83K - \$93K	\$125K - \$156K
Central	\$48K - \$54K	\$79K - \$81K	\$98K - \$104K
East	\$47K - \$50K	\$86K - \$91K	\$100K - \$125K

Benefits That Matter

Salary alone doesn't close deals. Here's what your competitors offer:

Benefit	West	Central	East
Individual Health Insurance	72%	89%	67%
Family Health Insurance	44%	79%	58%
Dental	56%	57%	58%
Retirement/401(k)	68%	79%	75%
Life Insurance	32%	46%	50%
Flight Training Assistance	32%	25%	42%

Industry-wide: 96% of shops gave salary increases in 2025, averaging 5-6%. 43-52% offer incentive pay averaging \$2,000-\$3,300 annually.

What Military Candidates Expect

Military technicians separating with 4-6 years of experience are coming from a total compensation package that includes:

- Base pay of \$35,000-\$50,000 (E-4 to E-6)
- Tax-free housing allowance (\$15,000-\$30,000 depending on location)
- Tax-free food allowance (~\$4,800)
- Full medical and dental coverage
- 30 days paid leave annually
- Life insurance

Their effective compensation is often \$60,000-\$85,000. If you're offering \$45,000 with no benefits, you're asking them to take a pay cut. They'll go to defense contractors or airlines instead.

Section 6: Job Postings That Attract Military Candidates

Why Your Current Postings Don't Work

Most job postings for avionics technicians are written by people who already understand the industry. They assume the reader knows what a Part 145 is, what Garmin equipment is, and what the job actually involves.

Military candidates don't have this context. When they see "5 years Part 145 experience required," they move on—even if they have 6 years of military avionics experience that would absolutely qualify them.

Your job posting is a sales document. You're selling the opportunity to candidates who have other options. Write it that way.

Job Posting Template: Install Technician

— SAMPLE JOB POSTING —

Avionics Install Technician

[Your Company Name] | [City, State]

Military Avionics Experience Accepted

If you maintained avionics systems in the military—whether on fighters, transports, helicopters, or any other platform—your experience counts here. We're a Part 145 repair station serving general and business aviation, and we need technicians who can troubleshoot, install, and maintain avionics systems. The civilian equipment brands are different, but the skills are the same.

What You'll Do

- Install avionics equipment in aircraft ranging from Cessnas to Citations
- Fabricate wire harnesses and route cabling according to installation drawings
- Troubleshoot integration issues when systems don't talk to each other
- Perform functional tests and work with inspectors to sign off completed work
- Work directly on aircraft in our hangar—this is hands-on work, not desk work

What We're Looking For

- Military avionics experience (any platform) OR 2+ years civilian avionics experience
- CAET certification required within 180 days of hire (we'll cover the cost)
- Ability to read wiring diagrams and installation drawings
- Wire termination and harness fabrication skills
- Attention to detail on documentation

Compensation & Benefits

- Starting pay: \$[XX]-\$[XX]/hour based on experience
- Health, dental, and vision insurance
- 401(k) with company match
- Paid time off
- CAET certification paid by company
- Ongoing training on civilian equipment

Why This Job

You'll work on a variety of aircraft instead of one platform. You'll go home every night. No deployments. You pick where you live. And if you're good, you'll advance quickly—this industry rewards performance, not just seniority.

— END SAMPLE —

Key Phrases That Work

- **"Military avionics experience accepted"** — Signals that you understand military experience has value
- **"Any platform"** — Removes worry that only specific experience counts
- **"CAET required within 180 days (we'll cover the cost)"** — Shows you invest in employees
- **"No deployments. You pick where you live."** — Speaks to military pain points
- **Specific salary range** — Don't make them guess. Military pay is transparent; yours should be too.

Where to Post

- **AEA Career Center** (coming soon) — targeted industry audience
- **Military transition job boards:** Hire Heroes USA, American Job Centers on bases, TAP offices

- **LinkedIn** — many transitioning military actively use it
- **Indeed** — high volume, lower quality, but military candidates do search there
- **Local base newspapers and transition offices** — if you're near a military installation

Section 7: The Interview Process

What You're Actually Evaluating

You're not evaluating whether they know Garmin or Collins equipment—they don't, and that's fine. You're evaluating:

- **Fundamental electronics knowledge:** Do they understand circuits, troubleshooting methodology, and test equipment?
- **Hands-on capability:** Can they actually do the physical work?
- **Trainability:** Will they pick up civilian equipment quickly?
- **Work ethic and professionalism:** Will they show up, do the job, and not create drama?
- **Cultural fit:** Will they work well with your team?

Interview Structure That Works

Phase 1: Shop Tour (30 minutes)

Walk them through your facility. Show them aircraft you're working on, your bench area, test equipment. Watch their reactions. Do they ask good questions? Do they seem genuinely interested? Can they relate what they're seeing to their military experience?

Good signs: "That reminds me of the test set we used for..." or "What's the civilian equivalent of...?"

Bad signs: Disengaged, no questions, can't connect what they see to anything they've done.

Phase 2: Technical Conversation (30-45 minutes)

Don't quiz them on civilian equipment they haven't seen. Ask about what they actually did:

- "Walk me through how you'd troubleshoot an intermittent comm radio failure."
- "Tell me about a time you had to figure out a problem that wasn't in the technical manual."
- "What test equipment are you most comfortable with? How did you use it?"
- "Describe the most complex troubleshooting problem you solved."
- "How did you document your work in the military? What happens if documentation is wrong?"

Phase 3: Hands-On Assessment (30-45 minutes)

Give them something practical to do. Options:

- **Wire termination:** Hand them a connector, pins, wire, and crimping tools. See if they can build a basic harness. Quality matters more than speed.
- **Wiring diagram interpretation:** Show them a simple installation diagram and ask them to explain what it shows, identify components, and describe how they'd approach the install.
- **Multimeter use:** Have them demonstrate basic measurements—resistance, voltage, continuity. Anyone with real electronics experience can do this without thinking.
- **Troubleshooting scenario:** "This audio panel has no sidetone. Walk me through how you'd diagnose it." You're evaluating methodology, not knowledge of specific equipment.

Phase 4: Fit and Expectations (15-20 minutes)

Discuss the practical realities:

- Hours, overtime expectations, on-call requirements
- Pay, benefits, growth path
- CAET requirement and timeline
- Their questions about the job, company, industry
- Start date availability

Questions to Avoid

Don't ask:

- "Do you have Garmin experience?" (They don't. Move on.)
- "Are you familiar with Part 145 requirements?" (They're not. That's what CAET covers.)
- "Why did you leave the military?" (Often their service commitment ended. It's not a red flag.)

Evaluating O-Level vs. I-Level Background

O-Level (Organizational/Flight Line) experience:

- Strong for install technician roles
- Comfortable working on aircraft, LRU-level troubleshooting
- May need development on component-level bench repair

I-Level (Intermediate/Shop) experience:

- Strong for bench technician roles
- Component-level repair, test equipment, detailed troubleshooting
- May be less comfortable with aircraft-level installation work

Both are valuable—just match them to the right role or plan for cross-training.

Section 8: SkillBridge: Your Free Hiring Advantage

What SkillBridge Is

The DoD SkillBridge program allows active-duty service members to intern with civilian employers during their **final 180 days of military service**. During this time, **the Department of Defense continues to pay their salary and benefits**. You get up to six months of work from a trained technician at no labor cost.

Read that again. Free labor for up to six months, from someone with military avionics training, with no obligation to hire them at the end—though most employers do because the program works.

Why This Matters for You

- **Zero labor cost during internship:** DoD pays their salary, housing allowance, and benefits
- **Extended evaluation period:** Six months to assess fit before making a permanent hire
- **Pre-trained candidates:** They arrive with electronics fundamentals already established
- **Motivated workers:** They're auditioning for a job they want to keep
- **Pipeline development:** Build relationships with military installations in your area

How to Become a SkillBridge Provider

Step 1: Verify Eligibility

- Your business must be operational for at least 3 years
- You must be in good standing (verified through Secretary of State)
- You must offer meaningful training, not just menial labor

Step 2: Complete Required Training

Complete the DoD SkillBridge Employer Ethics Brief (online course). Save your completion certificate—you'll submit it with your application.

Step 3: Submit Application

Applications are processed twice yearly: Spring (February 1 - April 1) and Fall. Go to skillbridge.osd.mil, select "Apply to be a SkillBridge Partner," and complete the application. You'll need:

- Company information and point of contact
- Training plan describing what interns will learn

- Job descriptions for SkillBridge positions
- Ethics course completion certificate

Step 4: Sign MOU

After review (4-6 weeks), you'll receive a Memorandum of Understanding from DoD. Sign and return it.

Step 5: Create Program Details

Once approved, you'll get access to the SkillBridge Content Management System to create and publish your opportunities.

Minimum Participation Requirements

Company Size	Minimum Candidates/Year
Small (≤200 employees)	At least 1 candidate
Midsize (201-400 employees)	At least 2 candidates
Midsize (401-600 employees)	At least 3 candidates
Large (601-1000 employees)	At least 4 candidates
Large (1000+ employees)	At least 5 candidates

For most AEA member shops, this means committing to at least one SkillBridge intern per year—a very low bar for the benefit received.

Industry Example: Duncan Aviation

Duncan Aviation, one of the largest business aviation MROs in the country and an AEA member, operates an active SkillBridge program. Their program offers transitioning service members hands-on experience in avionics, airframe, and other maintenance roles at their facilities in Lincoln, NE and Battle Creek, MI.

Their approach: treat SkillBridge interns like any new team member, provide real work and real training, and hire the good ones when they separate. The result is a pipeline of trained technicians who are ready to contribute from day one as permanent employees.

If Duncan Aviation can do it at scale, you can do it at your shop.

Making It Work

- **Assign a mentor:** Pair each SkillBridge intern with an experienced technician who can guide their transition
- **Provide real work:** Don't stick them in a corner. Give them actual projects under supervision

- **Start CAET during the internship:** Use part of their SkillBridge time to complete CAET certification
- **Have the job offer ready:** If they're good, make the offer before they finish. Other employers are competing for them

SkillBridge Timeline

Plan ahead. A typical SkillBridge hire works like this:

- **6-12 months before separation:** Service member researches SkillBridge opportunities
- **4-6 months before separation:** Service member applies to your program and gets command approval
- **180 days before separation:** SkillBridge internship begins (or less, depending on approval)
- **Separation date:** Military obligation ends; permanent employment begins

Section 9: Onboarding Military Hires

The First Week: Setting Expectations

Military technicians are used to structure. The first week should establish:

- **Work hours and schedule:** When do you start? When do you leave? How does overtime work?
- **Chain of communication:** Who do they report to? Who assigns work? Who answers questions?
- **Safety requirements:** PPE, FOD prevention, hangar rules—they'll take this seriously
- **Documentation systems:** How does your shop handle work orders, signoffs, and records?
- **CAET timeline:** Reinforce the 180-day requirement and how you'll support them

FAA Regulations and Part 145 Operations

This is the biggest knowledge gap. Military maintenance operates under different regulations than FAA Part 145. Key areas to cover:

- **Return to service:** Who can sign off work? What documentation is required?
- **8130-3 tags:** What they are, when they're needed, how to complete them
- **STC and AD compliance:** How Supplemental Type Certificates and Airworthiness Directives work
- **Quality system:** Your shop's QA requirements, inspection procedures
- **Manufacturer documentation:** How to find and use CMMs, IPCs, and installation manuals

Don't assume any of this is intuitive. CAET covers it, but reinforce it with on-the-job explanation.

Equipment Training

They've never seen civilian avionics equipment. Plan for training on:

- **Garmin systems:** GTN series navigators, G500/G600 displays, GFC autopilots
- **Collins Aerospace:** Pro Line series, TDR transponders, comm systems
- **Honeywell:** Primus systems, EFIS, weather radar
- **Connectivity systems:** Gogo, Starlink Aviation, Viasat, SmartSky
- **Your most common installations:** Focus on what you actually do 80% of the time

AEA offers training programs including basic wire harness fabrication and pitot-static systems courses. Use these to supplement on-the-job training.

Mentorship Matters

Assign an experienced technician as their point person for the first 90 days. Not a supervisor—a **mentor** they can ask "stupid questions" without feeling judged. Military technicians are used to having senior techs guide them through unfamiliar systems. Replicate that dynamic.

The mentor should:

- Answer questions about equipment, procedures, and shop culture
- Provide feedback on work quality before it goes to QA
- Help translate civilian terminology when military habits slip in
- Check in regularly on how they're adjusting

30/60/90 Day Check-ins

Formal check-ins at 30, 60, and 90 days ensure issues are caught early:

30 Days:

- Are they adapting to the work environment?
- Any issues with basic job functions?
- Have they started CAET?
- Questions or concerns from either side?

60 Days:

- Progress on CAET certification?
- Increasing independence on assigned tasks?
- Areas where additional training is needed?
- Integration with the team?

90 Days:

- On track for CAET completion by 180 days?
- Working independently at expected level?
- Discussion of longer-term development path
- Formal performance feedback

Section 10: Retention Strategies

Why Military Hires Leave

You spent time and money recruiting and training them. Don't lose them to stupid, preventable reasons:

- **Below-market pay:** They talk to other veterans. They know what other shops pay. If you're below market, they'll leave.
- **No growth path:** Military careers have clear advancement tracks. If yours doesn't, they feel stuck.
- **Lack of respect:** They were trusted with million-dollar equipment in the military. If you micromanage them, they resent it.
- **Poor communication:** Military organizations are clear about expectations. If you're vague, they're frustrated.
- **Benefits gaps:** They came from full medical, dental, housing allowance. If your benefits are weak, they notice.

What Actually Retains Them

Clear advancement path

Show them where they can go. Technician → Lead Tech → Shop Manager → Director of Maintenance isn't just possible in GA/BA—it happens regularly. Make sure they know it.

Continued learning

Military training never stopped. Keep them learning:

- Manufacturer training courses (Garmin, Collins, etc.)
- AEA training programs
- Cross-training on different aircraft types
- A&P pursuit support (if interested)
- Leadership development as they advance

Merit-based advancement

One of the biggest GA/BA selling points over airlines is that advancement is merit-based, not seniority-based. Live up to that promise. If they're good, promote them. Don't make them wait behind less capable people who happened to be hired first.

Competitive compensation

Review pay annually. 96% of shops gave increases in 2025. If you're not keeping up with the market, you're falling behind. Use the AEA Rate & Labor Survey data to benchmark.

Ownership potential

This is unique to GA/BA. Some of your technicians could become shop owners someday. Talk about it. The path from technician to owner isn't theoretical—it happens. Let them know the possibility exists if they want it.

Flexibility

They did shift work, deployments, and weekend duty for years. Now they want to coach their kid's baseball team and be home for dinner. If you can offer stable hours and flexibility for family commitments, advertise it.

Reserves and Guard compatibility

Many veterans continue in the Reserves or National Guard. This means drill weekends and annual training (usually 2 weeks). Be flexible about this. It's the law (USERRA), but more importantly, supporting their continued service builds loyalty. They'll remember that you didn't make their military obligation difficult.

Warning Signs They're Leaving

- Sudden disengagement after being motivated
- Unexplained absences or "appointments"
- Asking about final pay policies or PTO payout
- Decreased interaction with team members
- Resume updates on LinkedIn

If you see these signs, have a direct conversation. Ask what's going on. Sometimes it's fixable—a raise, a new challenge, a schedule adjustment. Sometimes they're just moving on. Either way, knowing early is better than being surprised.

Section 11: Common Mistakes

Mistakes That Cost You Candidates

1. Requiring "Part 145 experience" when military experience counts

Your job posting says "3 years Part 145 experience required." A 6-year military avionics tech with more training than most civilians sees that and doesn't apply. You just lost a qualified candidate over semantics.

Fix: "3 years avionics experience required. Military avionics experience accepted."

2. Lowballing on salary

Military technicians understand their compensation package. When you offer \$45,000 for a job that pays \$55,000 at the shop down the road, they decline. Word travels in veteran communities.

Fix: Pay market rate. Use the AEA survey data. It's cheaper than constant turnover.

3. Expecting them to know civilian equipment already

They don't know Garmin from Avidyne. They've never seen a Gogo system. Expecting familiarity with specific civilian equipment screens out candidates who could learn it quickly.

Fix: Evaluate fundamentals and trainability, not brand-specific knowledge.

4. Dismissive interview questions

"So, you only have military experience?" This signals that you don't value what they bring. They'll take the next offer that doesn't come with condescension.

Fix: "Tell me how your military experience prepared you for this work."

5. No clear onboarding plan

Day one: "Here's a toolbox, figure it out." They came from structured training environments. Throwing them in the deep end without guidance frustrates them and wastes their potential.

Fix: Structured 90-day onboarding with assigned mentor and clear milestones.

Mistakes That Cost You Employees

6. Micromanaging experienced technicians

They maintained jets in combat zones. Watching over their shoulder while they crimp a connector is insulting. Trust their competence while providing guidance on shop-specific procedures.

7. No growth conversation

Military careers have constant evaluation and promotion potential. If you never discuss their future, they assume there isn't one. They'll find an employer who invests in development.

8. Ignoring Reserve/Guard obligations

They have drill weekends and annual training. Making this difficult—requiring excessive notice, scheduling conflicts, passive-aggressive comments—creates resentment. And it may violate federal law.

9. Weak benefits

They left guaranteed healthcare, housing allowance, and 30 days leave for your company. If your benefits package is an afterthought, they notice. Defense contractors and airlines have strong benefits. You're competing with that.

10. Not completing the CAET requirement

You said CAET within 180 days, then never followed up. Now they haven't done it, you haven't enforced it, and the standard means nothing. Either enforce the requirement or don't make it.

Section 12: Resources & Next Steps

AEA Resources

- **AEA Career Center** (coming soon) — Post jobs targeting industry professionals
- **AEA Training:** Basic Wire Harness Fabrication, Pitot-Static Systems courses
- **Rate & Labor Survey:** Annual compensation benchmarking data for members
- **Member Directory:** aea.net member search to find and connect with other shops

CAET Certification

- **Website:** [AEA CAET portal]
- **Training Cost:** \$359 for online program
- **Exam Cost:** \$119
- **Total Investment:** \$478 per technician

SkillBridge Resources

- **DoD SkillBridge Portal:** skillbridge.osd.mil
- **Employer Ethics Training:** Required before application (available on portal)
- **Application Periods:** Spring (Feb 1 - Apr 1) and Fall annually
- **Approval Timeline:** 4-6 weeks after application submission

Military Transition Resources

- **Hire Heroes USA:** hireheroesusa.org — connects veterans with employers
- **American Job Centers:** Located on or near military installations
- **TAP (Transition Assistance Program):** Every separating service member goes through it

Your Action Checklist

Immediate (This Month)

- Review your current job postings—do they welcome military experience?
- Benchmark your compensation against AEA survey data
- Identify a point person for military recruiting efforts

Short-Term (Next 90 Days)

- Update job posting language using templates in this toolkit

- Create interview process that evaluates military candidates fairly
- Establish CAET policy (180-day requirement with employer reimbursement)
- Begin SkillBridge application if appropriate for your shop

Ongoing

- Post positions to military-focused job boards
- Develop relationships with nearby military installations
- Track and refine your military hiring process based on results
- Share success stories with AEA to help other member shops

Contact AEA Workforce Development

Aircraft Electronics Association

3570 NE Ralph Powell Road

Lee's Summit, MO 64064

Phone: 816-347-8400

Email: info@aea.net

Web: aea.net

The military technicians are out there. They're trained. They're looking for jobs. They just don't know your shop exists. Fix that.

— *End of Toolkit* —