

The Recruiters' Dilemma

Do you know enough to die for your country? If you're like most students, then probably not. Nevertheless, the Pentagon sets aside a few billion dollars every year for recruitment efforts, pouring millions into market research, website development, the maintenance of an enormous (and illegal) database, and flashy MTV-style advertising campaigns as part of a grand effort to lure **you** and the rest of **our nation's young people** into joining the armed forces. Since antiwar sentiment has grown in response to the American occupation of Iraq, however, recruitment rates have plummeted, forcing the Army to lower its quotas and intelligence standards for recruits, as well as step up recruitment propaganda on the home front.

As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan drag on, American troops are being recycled. Many are now serving their third or fourth tours of duty, and are exhausted, nerve-racked, and frightened by a growing insurgency that receives widespread support from the Iraqi people. Since 2003, the U.S. has also been building 14 "enduring" military bases in Iraq in order to protect oil fields and the new Iraqi government, which will demand the presence of troops for several more years. The insurgency poses a very real threat to U.S. troops and security forces in the region as well, and before long, the United States will probably attack Iran and, eventually, Syria. The Bush administration has made it very clear that it has no serious intention to withdraw troops from Iraq, and that American soldiers will be stationed there for years, if not decades to come. Tally it up, and one thing is obvious: *The Pentagon is going to need to make up for those lost recruits.*

The Student's Dilemma

If you're a high school or college student, this puts you in a precarious situation. Not only are you more likely to be forced into service if Congress ever calls for a draft, but military recruiters have more access to you than they do to other segments of the population. The Supreme Court recently ruled that colleges are obligated to allow recruiters on campuses and, due to a little-known provision in the Bush administration's No Child Left Behind Act, high schools are required by law to not only open their doors to recruiters, but also **provide them with students' phone numbers and addresses**. Schools that refuse to do so risk losing federal funding, and even though schools are required to notify parents about the law and provide them with an opportunity to refuse to release their children's information, many parents remain either confused or uninformed. In short, if you are a student, then you are an ideal target in the eyes of military recruiters.

This has terrible implications for low income and minority students, especially in areas where they make up a large percentage of the population. Unfortunately, these students often receive low scores on standardized math and science tests; this in turn means that their college and advanced job opportunities remain bleak. As a result, the armed forces purposefully target minority students for recruitment, often on the assumption that they're not as useful or socially valuable as their math- and science-oriented, (typically wealthier) white counterparts are. In many communities, in fact, recruiters develop close ties with law enforcement agencies and schools; and in many high schools, recruiters develop close ties, buddy-buddy relationships, etc. with students in order to seduce them into joining the military. By promising signing bonuses, job training, money for college, and the opportunity to "see the world," these recruiters do their best to coax students into enlisting.

What Recruiters Won't Tell You*

Military recruiters are salespeople, though, who are under tremendous pressure to meet recruiting goals. **It is not in their interests to be honest with you**, and in many cases they will either **lie** or **omit** much-needed information. In fact, one of the most common complaints from counselors, attorneys, activists, and especially recruits is that recruiters lie. Contrary to what recruiters might tell you:

Military enlistments are potentially unlimited in length.

According to the "fine print" on the back of the first page of a military enlistment "contract" (DD FORM 4/1), despite the stated length of enlistment (usually four years), recruits can be kept in the military indefinitely, or called back from the reserves several years later. This takes on special significance today, as the Bush administration has declared a "war on terror," which has no foreseeable end.

Very few recruits ever receive funding for college.

Recruiters will promise \$20,000-\$70,000 for college, but the new GI Bill is not so easy to use, since recruits do not learn until *after* leaving the military whether they've met all the requirements. In fact, the military actually *profits* from soldiers who buy into the Army College Fund—to the tune of \$72 million a year—because so few soldiers qualify to use it.

On top of this, the \$70,000 only goes to those soldiers who fill jobs that the military has a hard time filling. What's more, only 15% of soldiers from all services end up with a degree, and less than 10% of all Army recruits ever benefit from the Army College Fund.

* This section borrows heavily from Quaker House's "Military Recruiting FAQ" and data provided by Campus Antiwar Network.

The military does not provide useful job training.

Recruiters will often boast that military life is perfect for on-the-job training. This is sheer myth: Careful studies have shown that veterans typically earn 12% to 15% less than those who did not decide to join the military. Several jobs with prestigious-sounding titles are low skill or non-technical, and many jobs are so different from civilian jobs that skills do not transfer. As a result, many veterans have to be retrained before they can enter the civilian workforce.

The military is a homophobic and sexist institution.

The military's "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy prevents gay and lesbian troops from being open about their sexuality. As Campus Antiwar Network observes, this can produce an "unbearable atmosphere" for members of the LGBT community who are enlisted. Offensive speech and negative remarks about gays and lesbians are a common occurrence as well, and many troops have witnessed or experienced what they considered anti-gay harassment.

One in every three women in the military report being raped or sexually assaulted, and studies have shown that female veterans are often left with physical and emotional scars long after they've left the service. "Rape victims often experience post-traumatic stress symptoms such as anxiety, depression and intrusive thoughts, and are more likely to develop post-traumatic stress in other situations, according to military research," writes Women's eNews correspondent Marie Tessier. Moreover, servicewomen's superiors will often ignore or cover up instances of sexual assault in order to maintain morale among troops.

Health risks run high.

Death isn't the only health risk that soldiers face. For instance: Although fewer than 300 soldiers died during the first Gulf War, tens of thousands of Gulf War veterans have reported chronic, debilitating physical, and psychological disorders since serving. Recruiters are also not likely to point out that one in four veterans returning from the current war in Iraq has received medical treatment.

Veterans are treated poorly.

Perhaps the most shameful feature of American society is that roughly a third of all homeless persons are veterans. This is because many return from combat with severe health problems, unable to find their place in a civilian economy, and with their pensions and health care benefits severely slashed by the federal government.

Abuse runs high in military families.

Abuse occurs three to five times more often in military families than it does in civilian families. A recent study also shows that children in military families are twice as likely to be killed by their parents than ones in civilian families are.

A Person's Reasons for Enlisting**

A person's decision to enlist is extremely important. Although some recruiters will claim that new recruits can give the military a try and get out a couple months later if they don't like the experience, this is not true. There is no such thing as a "period of adjustment" for those who enlist.

If for some reason you're considering enlisting to get out of a bad personal or family situation, you should definitely rethink this strategy. Don't make this important decision if you feel upset, confused, pressured, or unsure about your future. Many people discover that their problems get worse after they join the military, while others find that their situations at home improve after they enlist.

If you're considering enlisting in order to serve your country, you might want to rethink this as well. U.S. foreign policy is aggressive and often inhuman: To date, the United States has either overthrown or attempted to overthrow the governments of no fewer than 40 different nations, has put down more than 30 different populist movements, and is the only nation to have ever been condemned by the World Court—the *highest tribunal on the planet*—for committing an act of international terrorism. (The same people condemned then control our government today.) There is quite a bit of myth surrounding the idea that the United States always acts as a force for peace and democracy, to say the least. Moreover, there are plenty of ways to serve your country that do not involve joining the military. If you do not enlist, it does not follow from this that you are unpatriotic.

And finally, you should ask yourself the following questions: Am I willing to fight for someone else's cause? Kill others who share more in common with me than I probably realize? Kill children or make orphans of others? Destroy people's houses and food? Risk my life to help enrich a handful of billionaires? If you answered no to any of these questions, then life in the army isn't for you. Once you enlist, you cannot choose.

If You Still Decide to Enlist...

If you still decide to enlist, be cautious. Don't rely only on what the recruiter tells you. If you can, talk with recently discharged veterans about the points raised in this pamphlet. If you do decide to enlist, or simply talk to a recruiter, be sure to take along a friend or family member

** This section and the one following it borrow heavily from the American Friends Service Committee's brochure on enlistment.

to take notes, ask questions, and watch out for you. This also applies if you discuss job selection with a military "guidance counselor" at a Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS).

You should be honest about your police records, health problems, and school. If it gets out that you lied, the punishment will fall on *you* – even if the recruiter asked you to lie. If a recruiter lies to you (or asks you to lie), report him or her to Congress members and school officials. This will protect you and your peers from being exploited.

In addition to this:

- Do not sign any papers until you've taken them home for a parent, trustworthy teacher, knowledgeable friend, or someone else you know and trust to review them.
- Make sure to get all the recruiter's promises in writing in your enlistment agreement. Spoken promises are meaningless, and will not protect you.
- Find out whether you need to pass a special test, get a security clearance, or fulfill any other requirements before you can receive the job or options you want.

Again, be very careful when you decide to enlist. If you go through with it, the armed forces will be part of your life for at least eight years, including time spent in the Reserves. During that time, you can be called away from work, school, or home to go to war.

If You've Already Enlisted...

Hang on to this pamphlet. If you've already enlisted through the Delayed Enlistment Program and are having second thoughts about life in the military, call the GI Rights Hotline at **1-800-394-9544**. This is a free non-governmental service that can help you with military discharges, conscientious objection, harassment, and if you've gone AWOL. If you ever have problems in the military, call the GI Rights Hotline.

More Information

For more information, visit the websites below:

- <http://www.afsc.org/youthmil/>
- <http://www.objector.org/>
- <http://www.girights.org/>

This pamphlet was prepared by the CHR: a fake church with a real mission. You can find this pamphlet on our website at: <http://church.thedashcat.net/>



DO YOU KNOW ENOUGH TO DIE FOR YOUR COUNTRY?



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