

ARE YOU THINKING OF JOINING THE MILITARY?

You've probably heard the ads and the recruiter's sales pitch. Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? All advertising does. But if military life doesn't live up to the advertising, you can't bring your enlistment agreement back to the recruiter for a refund. *You are obligated to the military for a total of eight years*, including time in the reserves when you could be recalled.

You wouldn't buy a car without looking under the hood. Don't enlist before you check out the reality of military life that lies behind the TV ads, video games, Web sites and slick brochures. *Check it out carefully!*

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT MILITARY LIFE

Do you enjoy having someone constantly telling you what to do and how to do it? If not, you may have a hard time with military life. Federal law (10 USC Sec. 654) says that the military places "numerous restrictions on personal behavior that would not be acceptable in civilian society." Military members are subject to military law 24 hours a day – even when off duty and off base – until the end of their term. Disobedience in the military can result in court-martial, prison, or the lifetime problem of a bad discharge.

If you can't finish your first enlistment term, you could lose all or part of the education and other benefits you were promised and be forced to pay back any "signing bonus" you received. One-third of new recruits do not finish their first term (RAND Corporation, 2005).

Furthermore, section C.9b of the enlistment agreement says *your status, pay, benefits and responsibilities in the military can change without warning and REGARDLESS of any promises in your agreement!* And the military has the right to keep you past your discharge date. From 2002 to 2008, 58,000 people were kept from leaving the military when their terms were up (*L.A. Times*, 5/9/08).

SOME BASIC RIGHTS YOU WILL LOSE:

- If you leave your work without permission or don't show up, you can be put in jail.
- Any disobedience can result in criminal punishment.
- You can be punished without the right to see a lawyer or have a trial.
- You may be ordered to commit acts that violate your most basic values, like killing another human being.

- Your ability to spend time with your parents, wife or husband, and other family members will be severely limited.
- You will be subject to routine urine tests for drugs.

THE MILITARY JOB TRAINING MYTH

Many people join the military expecting to receive job training. But remember, military training is designed for military jobs, not to help you get a civilian job later. Even in the technically oriented Air Force, many jobs require particular military skills that won't do you much good in the civilian world.

Even if you get the training you were promised for a particular military occupation, you still might not get any experience in the job because the military does not have to use you in the field you trained for. The enlistment agreement allows the military to assign you to whatever job they choose.

During the time some young people spend in the military, others who are the same age are spending those years in college or trade school, or getting work experience. As a result, the unemployment rate for young veterans is twice as high as their peers who did not enlist (*Bureau of Labor Statistics, Biennial Employment Situation of Veterans Survey*, May 26, 2006).

As former Vice President Dick Cheney once said, "The military is not a social welfare agency; it's not a jobs program."

WHAT ABOUT PROMISES OF BONUSES?

Enlistment "bonuses" are not really bonuses paid just for joining: they are usually paid out over time, and you may have to return the money if you don't complete certain requirements. In 2005, when the Army was advertising enlistment bonuses of up to \$20,000, only 6% of Army recruits got that amount, 47% got smaller amounts, and 47% got no bonus at all.

THE EASY MONEY FOR COLLEGE MYTH

Recruiters might promise you that college will be "free," but it's not free – you must work for it! And

the benefits will not be guaranteed, even under the new GI bill that goes into effect in August 2009.

Although there have been early promises of more money than under the old GI bill, more school options, and a chance for military members to transfer unused financial aid to other family members, vets counseled warn that there could be many problems. For example:

- People will have to enlist for a total of 10 years to transfer unused college benefits to family members.
- People who receive a less than fully honorable discharge (as about one in four people do) will lose all GI bill benefits—including those with "general discharges," often given for minor problems with military duties.
- Those who leave the military early (as one in three do) will get reduced benefits.
- Veterans who wish to attend college outside the state where they live may only get part of their tuition covered.

If you are worried about financing college, there are many other sources of aid to look at. Colleges can help you find aid, and it pays to investigate the many alternatives before signing away eight years of your life to the military. If you go straight to college, instead of the military, you can start earning the higher wages of a college graduate much sooner.

THE MYTH OF EQUALITY

The military claims it treats everyone the same, regardless of skin color, but in reality, it has serious problems with inequality in the ranks. In 2007, 27.2% of the enlisted personnel were people of color, but they made up only 14.3% of the commissioned officers. Latinos in the Marine Corps, for example, made up 11.4% of the enlisted ranks, but only 5% of the officers (*Demographic Profile of the DoD and Coast Guard*, Sept. 2007).

Discrimination against gays, lesbians and bisexuals is not only intense within the military, it has been official policy. Since the so-called "Don't ask, don't tell" policy was introduced, many lesbian and gay personnel have been kicked out. Even if this policy were to be repealed, the potential for violence against gay people in the military would continue to be very high.

How some recruiters bend the rules: "You'll be told to call Johnny or Susan and tell them to lie and say they've never had asthma like they told you, that they don't have a juvenile criminal history. That recruiter is going to bend the rules and get the lies told and process the fraudulent paperwork." – **Lawrence Kagawa**, retired in 2008 after 10 years of recruiting, *Time Magazine*, 4/2/09

WHAT WOMEN EXPERIENCE

Women often join the military to gain skills and break out of traditional roles. However, while the range of military work open to female personnel has increased over the years, they are still banned from combat specialties. Some recruiters have used this fact to make women think they won't see combat, but they ARE being sent to combat areas where there are no clear front lines and the risk of death or serious injury exists almost everywhere. As of February 2009, 116 women in the military had died in Iraq and Afghanistan; 603 had been wounded.

In addition to the dangers of war, sexual harassment and rape are a serious threat to women in the military. The military promised to do something about this many years ago, but the problem has not gone away. Government surveys have shown that almost a third of women in the military are sexually assaulted. (National Public Radio, 10/4/07).

WAR—YOU THINK IT WON'T HAPPEN TO YOU?

Some people who join have been led to believe they won't be sent to war or see combat because: they are promised a non-combat job, they are joining the National Guard or Reserves, they are going to become officers, they are female, or they have been told there won't be a war when they finish training. But people in all of these categories have been sent to combat zones. Also, joining the Navy or Air Force does not mean you won't be given dangerous ground duty in a war, like the thousands of sailors and airmen who have been sent to Iraq and Afghanistan.

The main purpose of the military is to fight wars. If you are ordered to a war zone, you can't refuse to go. And if you suddenly realize that your religious, political or moral beliefs won't allow you to go to war, it can be very hard to get out of the military. Before enlisting, it's important to first talk to a veteran or someone who has experienced war, and then decide if it is something you can accept.



SERVICE AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Many good people join the military because they want to make a difference, to serve others. This is a very positive goal, but after joining, you may find out that it's not the kind of service you expected, and then it would be too late to change your mind.

Over the last 50 years, several different presidents have ordered our military to attack and occupy countries that never threatened us, like Vietnam, Grenada, Panama and Iraq. Instead of defending their country, some military members have felt they were used to defend a foreign dictator or the profits of oil companies. But they had no choice unless they were willing to refuse orders and risk jail.

If service is your goal, it's important to ask yourself some hard questions: Regardless of the rank or military job you are given, would you be willing to support missions you might not believe in and actions that could cause great destruction and the loss of many innocent lives? Would you be willing to share responsibility for such things in order to get money for college or a job the military is promising?

If you're not sure how to answer these questions, take some time to think about them. You should also consider the fact that there are many different ways to serve your community, your country and the world. For example, you could become a teacher, a fire fighter, a community organizer, a social worker or an emergency medical technician—all of whom make a big difference in many people's lives.

DEP: THE DELAYED ENTRY PROGRAM

If you signed up for the DEP (or the Army's "Future Soldiers Training Program") and then changed your mind, watch out for recruiters who say you can't get out of it, or that you must report to boot camp to be released. Neither is true. To quit the DEP, there are simple steps you should take before your date to report for basic training. Don't expect your recruiter to help you, and you should NOT go to a military base if you are told to report there to get released. For free help getting out of the DEP, contact one of the groups listed in this brochure, or contact the **GI Rights Hotline**, 877-447-4487, www.girightshotline.org

THINGS YOU SHOULD ASK YOURSELF BEFORE ENLISTING:

- Are you prepared to fight in any war, in any place, at any time that the government orders you to?

- Have you checked out all the college financial aid and job training and placement possibilities in your community?

- Is joining the military something you want to do, or are you being pressured into it by other people?
- Is this a spur of the moment decision you may regret later?

- Besides talking to a military recruiter, have you spoken to any of the many veterans who didn't like the military? Why didn't they make the military a career?
- If you become unhappy after you enlist, do you know how hard it will be to get out?
- If you get a less-than-honorable discharge, do you know how it can affect your future?

9 THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN YOU TALK TO A RECRUITER

1) **Recruiters are not guidance counselors.** They are interested in you because if they don't meet their quota of recruits, they can be forced to work overtime or even punished. One veteran recruiter told a reporter for the *Albany Times Union*, "I've been recruiting for years and I don't know one recruiter who wasn't dishonest about it. I did it myself."

2) **Take along a parent or friend as a witness if you go see a recruiter.** That way you'll have somebody to back up your side of the story if there is a dispute over what was promised.

3) **If you have a police record or medical condition, don't hide it—even if the recruiter tells you it doesn't matter.**

4) **DON'T sign any papers until you have taken them home and read them over carefully.** If you ask for a copy of the enlistment agreement, they should give it to you. If they refuse, don't sign the agreement.

5) **Talk the enlistment agreement over with your parents and friends, or with a counselor from the GI Rights Hotline.** Ask about the parts of the agreement that you don't understand.

6) **GET ALL PROMISES IN WRITING and have them signed by the recruitment representative!** Spoken promises are worthless, but also remember that even written ones can be changed under the contract.

7) **Get copies of everything you sign.** Keep them in a safe place.

8) **If you want one of the military's enlistment options, be sure to ask the recruiter questions like the following:**

- For how long do I have to enlist to get this option?
- Are there any extra requirements (schooling, physical standards, security clearance, etc.) that I have to meet to qualify for this option? What happens if I don't meet them, but I've already enlisted?
- What if there is no space in the training program or job that I signed up for?

- For options that include assignment to a particular base or area: Am I guaranteed this assignment for the entire time I'm in?

9) **REMEMBER: If you don't like your new job, they don't have to let you switch, and you can't quit!** Early discharges can be hard to get without a penalty.

FINDING A NON-MILITARY JOB

Looking for a job can be a challenge. Some helpful advice and job search tools are available from the Web sites below. If you don't have your own Internet access, use a computer at your local library or school.

Career InfoNet: www.acinet.org

Idealist.org: www.idealist.org

Teens4Hire: www.teens4hire.org

CareerBuilder.com: www.careerbuilder.com

Career Voyages: www.careervoyages.gov

AmeriCorps: www.americorps.gov

For more information, contact:

AFSC Youth & Militarism Program
1501 Cherry St, Philadelphia, PA 19102
(215) 241-7176; www.afsc.org/youthmil.htm

Project on Youth and Non-Military Opportunities (Project YANO)

P.O. Box 230157, Encinitas, CA 92023
(760) 634-3604; www.projectyano.org

War Resisters League
339 Lafayette St, New York, NY 10012
(212) 228-0450; www.warresisters.org

GI Rights Hotline: www.girightshotline.org
877-447-4487

Local contact:

To order this brochure in bulk, contact War Resisters League. Produced by Project YANO, with thanks to the A.J. Muste Memorial Institute and the Rose and Sherle Wagner Foundation. 4/09

What You Should Know Before Joining the Military

The Military's Not Just a Job . . .



. . . It's Eight Years of Your Life!