



AUSA BACKGROUND BRIEF



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Army Issue: ARMY RECRUITING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reductions in the size of the Army have brought challenges (primarily from congressional oversight committees) to the scope of Army recruiting efforts and the funding needs for this purpose.

Recruiting, however, remains an essential function. While total annual recruiting requirements have decreased, the Army must renew itself annually to replace the turnover of personnel at the lower levels (40 percent of Army enlistees have four years or less service at any one time and only about eight percent progress to 20 years of service). New enlistees keep the force young and vigorous, and are the source of future soldier leaders.

The Army needs to continue to attract quality personnel to ensure a quality force. This means a vigorous recruiting organization and a solid program, including effective advertising.

Advertising is the most effective way to contact and get the message to high quality prospects. Unfortunately, the Army's advertising budget was reduced significantly by Congress in the FY 1993 DoD budget — a cut of 45 percent from the FY 1992 level. Advertising is now less than five percent of the recruiting dollar. Based on past experience, advertising should be about 14 percent of the recruiting dollar to be fully effective and to attract the number of quality recruits needed.

ISSUE

With the ongoing reductions of Army strength, questions have been raised on the need for continued aggressive recruiting and the resources to support recruiting efforts. The challenge has been directed particularly at resources expended for advertising.

BACKGROUND

While Army active strength has decreased from about 770,000 in FY 1989 to a little over 600,000 in FY 1993 and is projected to go to 520,000 by FY 1995, there is still a significant

requirement for an aggressive recruiting program. (There is no lateral input from the civil sector to the various enlisted experience and skill levels of the Army.)

About 40 percent of the force has four years or less service which means constant turnover. The personnel distribution curve is very wide at the bottom and narrow at the top. This is driven by force structure and the hierarchical distribution of skills. This means the Army must renew itself with entry level personnel annually.

Out of every 100 young men and women entering the Army in any given year, only eight will be in the Army and eligible to retire at 20 years service — and only three will continue to 30 years service. The largest drop comes between three and eight years service. This is contrary to public perceptions that most enlistees remain for a longer term career — when in fact they do not.

The need to constantly infuse new personnel into the Army as a source of future potential soldier leaders and to keep the force physically young and vigorous, requires constant recruiting. Lack of effective recruiting of personnel, including numbers and quality, can spell real problems in unit effectiveness as occurred in the Army's post Vietnam experience.

The story of the post-Vietnam Army is the story of a military organization emerging from the second most divisive war in our history. The Army converted from a draft-supported Army to a volunteer Army and underwent the most extensive technological changes in weapon systems and equipment modernization since World War II.

In 1976, Congress reduced the recruiting budget by 33 per cent, necessitating the withdrawal of television advertising. In 1978, more than 50 per cent of Army enlistees tested in mental category III (average) or below, and the Army was telling the youth of American it "wanted to join them." The Army reflected that theme.

In 1979, the recruiting shortfall was the equivalent of one full division. In fact, against an authorized end strength of 781,000 personnel, the actual end strength of the Army was 757,000. This was the period of the "hollow" Army.

In 1980 came the realization and recognition that something had to change, particularly a revitalization of recruiting. Aggressive advertising played a major role by getting the right message to the quality people. Random walk-ins to recruiting stations could not create the quality force needed for excellence. The results of this program were reflected in the superb Army that the American public saw during the Persian Gulf War.

DISCUSSION

The number of non-prior service enlistments required to renew the Army annually has dropped from about 110,000 in FY 1987 to about 70,000 this next fiscal year, and should remain essentially at this level since it is based on the size of the FY 1995 end state Army. With a smaller Army, it is necessary to attract the best, especially those who are retained and selected for future

leadership roles. This means maintaining a vigorous recruiting structure and getting the right message to the right people.

Here is where advertising is so important. The Army must, on a continuing basis, convince high-quality prospects that an Army enlistment is a personally beneficial and rewarding experience. Success at attracting quality individuals depends on ongoing, effective communications because:

- the enlistment consideration/decision is complex;
- high-quality, desirable youth have other opportunities; and
- there is a very narrow eligibility window (no matter what the status of the economy) during which time the most desirable prospects are available.

Advertising is particularly effective in recruiting programs; the effects of advertising are cumulative. The message has to be relevant, which means it must be tailored and focused. Effective advertising can inspire high levels of service commitment; influence retention behavior; cultivate attitudes that affect future enlistments; and put the right young men and women into the Army.

Recruiting in recent years has used about 14 percent of the overall recruiting budget for advertising. The congressionally-approved funding for advertising for FY 1993 was cut to \$21.7 million, which was 55 percent of FY 1992 funding and only 31 percent of the FY 1989 funding level. This reduction in funds occurred during a period when the end strength of the enlisted force dropped from about 660,000 to an estimated strength of 500,000 due to the reduction in size of the Army.

While television is the most expensive advertising media, it has proven very effective, particularly in attracting the "low involvement" individual — who would not normally be expected to be interested in the Army — into joining the Army. By contacting and influencing the right people, advertising becomes cost-effective.

For whatever reason, the propensity to join the Army by youths is not as strong as it has been in the past few years. It is particularly down for young males of higher mental capability. Statistics released in early February 1993 show some decline in the Army's recruitment of high school graduates (down to 94 percent as compared to 100 percent in the first quarter of FY 1992); also, there was a drop of four percentage points in the top three mental categories of the Armed Forces Qualification Test. While these statistics are still quite good, they indicate a possible trend.

There seems to be an erroneous perception that with the drawdown the Army is not in the market for recruits. Other contributing factors include a decline in the belief that the military experience is the best preparation for a civilian job and a decline in the attractiveness of the Army. All indicate some lack of knowledge of the opportunities by the public, in part due to reduced advertising exposure.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Even with declining strength, the Army must continue to recruit to replace the turnover of personnel which occurs during the early years of service. Recruitment also provides a qualified personnel pool for selection and training of future soldier leaders.

For a quality force, it is essential that top quality people be contacted and convinced of the merits of military service.

An effective and aggressive Army recruiting structure is necessary to maintain a steady input of qualified people. The recruiting structure also provides a means to respond to expansion requirements in the event of national emergency.

An important part of the recruiting effort is devoted to advertising. This has proven to be one of the most effective ways to contact the type of qualified people the Army needs.

Adequate budget resources are necessary to support a viable recruiting effort. The advertising budget is of particular concern. AUSA believes that to execute an effective recruiting program about 14 percent of the total recruiting budget should be allocated to advertising.

Advertising has declined from more than \$60 million a few years ago to less than \$30 million today and now represents less than five percent of the recruiting dollar. This trend needs to be reversed and a broad, effective advertising message sent to America's quality youth who otherwise may not be considering military service.

(This *Background Brief* was prepared by Lieutenant General Richard G. Trefry, USA Ret., an AUSA Senior Fellow, and the Institute of Land Warfare staff.)

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