
Defense Report

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Army Recruiting: Will Success Continue?

The Army's efforts to recruit an all-volunteer force have been an unqualified success to date. But, clouds have appeared on the horizon.

In the early 1970's, there was considerable doubt whether it was possible to recruit an all-volunteer military force. Congressman Eddie Hebert, then Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, is reported to have said, "The only way to get a volunteer Army is to draft it."

The draft actually ended in December 1972 and recruiting efforts were erratic during much of 1973. But, when qualified recruiters in sufficient numbers, about 6,000, were in place at the end of the year, quotas began to be filled regularly and the Army has met its recruiting goals ever since.

The Army has also been successful to date in recruiting quality as well as quantity. Nearly 60 per cent of new recruits fall above the median intelligence level of all U.S. citizens. Just under 60 per cent are high school graduates. The Army has not become a predominantly poor, predominantly black outfit as was predicted by many.

Today recruiting success continues despite such restrictions as a 10 per cent cut in advertising, a reduction of several hundred recruiters and the requirement to meet weekly instead of monthly quotas.

However, Major General E. P. Forrester, the Army's recruiting boss, is worried about the reduction in recruiters and advertising dollars. He and other experts are also watching for a possible impact on the quality of recruits as the national economy continues to improve.

Recent studies indicate that today's high school graduate—the prime target of the recruiting effort—is more interested in civilian employment as opposed to enlisting than he was just six months ago. However, the surveys also show that parents, the prime influencers of potential enlistees, are showing much greater confidence in the military, especially the Army, and many now think that enlistment after high school graduation is a good idea. General Forrester hopes these two trends will balance each other.

If they don't, military recruiting may be in trouble, especially from the quality standpoint. The cut in advertising and recruiters which takes effect on July 1st could also be serious as recruiting experts say this could mean a loss of 500-1,000 recruits per month.

In other words, volunteer force recruiting is a success so far, but whether this success can be sustained remains to be proved.