
Defense Report

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Special Help for Junior Enlisted People—The Fiscal Year 1979 Budget Looks Hopeful

There was a time, not so long ago, when Selective Service was the source of most of the young men who entered the Army. The Congress and the draftee's superiors knew they would be in uniform for just two years and operated on the assumption that anyone could tolerate some hardship for that brief period of time. As a result a number of practices grew that caused junior enlisted members of all the services to draw the short end of the stick.

Now we have a military force of volunteers. They are expensive to recruit and we want to keep them at least as long as a full three-year enlistment. We hope that many of them will find their initial enlistment so satisfying that they will "re-up" for a second hitch—or make the military a full career.

The Fiscal Year 1979 defense budget proposed by President Carter recommends corrective action to eliminate two remnants of the "draftee syndrome" that have been an irritant to volunteers in the Army. One would permit married enlisted members in the first four grades and with less than two year's service to move their families to authorized overseas stations at government expense. The second would provide for a two-year initial overseas tour for bachelors in areas like Germany where many young soldiers on 4-year enlistments now find themselves serving for as long as 42 months.

The Army estimates that it costs a young military family about \$1,375 to move to Germany, pay deposits on an apartment on the German economy and make the apartment livable. They start their tour in debt and have little opportunity to travel or enjoy what otherwise would be a most pleasant period of service. Frequently the family must give up and return home to live with parents or relatives. The whole process is detrimental to morale and certainly does not contribute positively to reenlistment rates.

And three years or more away from home is a long time for the young bachelor soldiers, often separated from their families for the first time. Every month of extended service overseas increases the likelihood that they will become a morale or disciplinary problem. By letting the four-year enlistees return home from Europe after a 24-month tour they can have a productive 18-month assignment in the states before having to make a reenlistment decision.

In the context of the overall defense budget the amount of money needed to support these programs in the Army is insignificant—\$47 million for the dependent travel plan and \$7 million for the shorter bachelor tours. The Congress should support this excellent investment in morale and retention.