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# Defense Report

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## Today's Military Recruits—They Serve For Barely Half the Minimum Wage

In a recent press conference Robert Pirie, the Assistant Secretary of Defense who heads the manpower program, bemoaned the growing gap between the pay of new military recruits and the vast number of civilian jobs in which young people are paid the federal minimum wage of \$2.90 per hour. According to Pirie's calculations the minimum wage has grown so fast in the past four years that it has outstripped the military "entry pay" received by recruits. According to Pirie, recruit pay was 115 percent of the minimum wage in 1975 but it has now shrunk to just 83 percent and he expects it to drop to just 80 percent by 1981.

Mr. Pirie's alarm is certainly justified. The bright young high school graduates all the armed services seek to recruit can make the same calculations and conclude that they would be financially better-off working in a fast food restaurant or pushing a broom for the minimum wage than exposing themselves to the rigors of military service. Certainly the recruiters who are struggling to meet enlistment quotas among the recent 1979 high school graduating classes cannot point to the military pay scale as an incentive.

Actually, the gap between military entry pay and the minimum wage is far greater than the Department of Defense cares to acknowledge. The young man or woman working for the minimum wage knows that if they work overtime they will make proportionately more money. The military recruits gets \$419.40 a month, no matter how many hours he or she works—and in the basic training situation a 12-hour day is a pleasant exception to 16 or 18-hour days. In a month of 22 working days the minimum wage worker who punches the time clock for 12 hours per day would earn \$766 without any overtime differential. A recruit who has the same kind of "easy" month—with just five duty days per week and no more than 12 hours of training in those days—still earns just \$419.40.

This entry level is the only point at which there can be an easy comparison between military and civilian pay. It is almost impossible to compare the pay of a factory foreman and a platoon sergeant, although each may supervise 40 people. With all pay and allowances the Chief of Staff of the Army, who leads 775,000 soldiers, makes less than \$70,000 while the president of General Motors makes quadruple that amount.

The White House, the Department of Defense, the Congress and Americans in general must acknowledge that successful competition for qualified people in an environment of a shrinking population of military age men and women depends heavily on adequate compensation. We cannot buy effective fighting forces "on the cheap."