
Defense Report

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Warfare Is Growing More Complex — The Army Must Have More Soldiers Who Can Deal with It

Each passing year sees the nature of warfare changing from what was once a simple matter of man against man to a contest between men paired with machines—with the machines growing steadily more complex. More than at any time in the two centuries it has existed, the U.S. Army needs a constant flow of very bright young men and women.

In 1975 almost a third of the Army's recruits were in the top three aptitude categories (I, II and IIIA). That number fell to 31.7 percent in 1976 and, by 1980, had bottomed out at 20.7 percent. The event that seems to have had the most to do with that decline was the end of the GI Bill education benefits on 31 December, 1976. Young people considering enlistment during 1976 were turned aside by a substantial upsurge in the number of education grants and loans made by the federal government with no accompanying obligation to serve the nation.

The Army is convinced that the promise of education is the most effective single weapon in its recruitment arsenal. With the consent of Congress, Army recruiters increased the total amount of education money a soldier can accumulate under the existing not-so-satisfactory program and witnessed a climb in the number of high-quality recruits by almost 25 percent. When they doubled the education bonus for a six-year commitment to serve in the Army National Guard or Army Reserve the number of acceptances in the top three categories went up by an astounding 1,000 percent.

There are bills before both houses of Congress that would restore a GI Bill education incentive, but the Defense Department, speaking for the budget-conscious Reagan Administration, is opposing them primarily on the basis of cost. What the Administration, and others, have overlooked, however, is the fact that ongoing grant and loan programs operated by the Department of Education represent sufficient funds to operate a new GI Bill education plan. And by turning these funds in a new direction, the public investment would be repaid through service.

The evidence is undeniable. If our armed forces are to be prepared for the complexities of modern war, we must attract a larger share of college-bound recruits—and a good education incentive is our best recruiting tool.