
Defense Report

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How Do You Attract the Apprentice Soldier and Keep the Careerist? The Army Is in a Quandary

Our volunteer Army must compete with private enterprise for the services of the healthy, intelligent young men and women which both these segments of our society need to operate efficiently. The Army has the additional problem of keeping its good people in the ranks after they have been trained and have become potentially even more valuable to the private sector. Thus far in the modern history of volunteerism, the tendency on the part of the Department of Defense and Congress has been to set the entry level-pay of new or apprentice service personnel to a level that is hopefully competitive with the blandishments offered by civilian employment.

This approach has been modestly successful, but, in the view of the Army's Chief of Staff, Gen. Edward C. Meyer, the high level of apprentice pay has shrunk the difference in compensation between new soldiers and the journeymencareerists to the point where there is insufficient incentive to assume the responsibilities that go with a military career. As Gen. Meyer sees it, the first priority of the Army is to maintain a viable *career* force and the present pay scales do not put enough emphasis on that need. The Army should be able to distinguish more clearly between the soldier who is willing to serve a single enlistment and the one who can be motivated toward a military career.

In a draft environment this would be simple to do. A man or woman drafted into the Army could be paid at a subsistence level with the understanding that their service would be brief. If the draftee later decided to volunteer for further service he or she could be readily shifted to a career pay scale designed to eventually help support a family and to encourage assumption of career responsibilities. But we don't have an operative draft, so we are faced with the need to entice volunteers for that initial period of service. Gen. Meyer and the Army think that a properly designed package of educational incentives, closely paralleling the World War II GI Bill of Rights, could fill the gap between realistically set apprentice pay and more appropriate levels of career pay as a lure toward the initial decision to enlist. Careerists, of course, should also have an education incentive available.

The growing complexity of modern warfare and the equipment with which that war would be fought demands that our military ranks be filled with good people at all levels of experience and responsibility. A properly constructed level of apprentice pay coupled with adequate incentives of other kinds, primarily education, could bring in recruits of the needed quality. A more noticeable jump in pay from the apprentice to the career level, once again coupled with a realistic incentive package, could help us convert the best of the apprentices into journeymen soldiers and keep them for a full career.