
Defense Report

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For a Lot of Reasons — The Army is Getting and Keeping Better People

In 1979 the United States Army fell almost 11 percent short of its recruiting goal. The following year the service discovered that a major error had been made in evaluating the aptitude test scores of its recruits and that it had taken in many more people in the lowest eligible group than it realized. But, for a variety of reasons, things have been looking up ever since.

The recruiters have been helped by the large pay raise passed last year, which returned the armed services, belatedly, to a state of comparability with civilian compensation. Evidence of better training, discipline and leadership in the Army have made that service more attractive, both to recruits and to soldiers at the decision point between a military career and life as a civilian. Undoubtedly, the depressed economy and the resulting shortage of jobs for young people plus new difficulty in financing a college education have also played their part in the upswing of enlistments and reenlistments.

The Army now finds itself with an embarrassment of riches. The senior military service has exceeded congressionally authorized ceilings and must struggle to find ways to pay the extra people until the numbers can be managed downward. And, far more important than this temporary management crisis, the Army is getting more well-qualified recruits into the combat arms, where training and service are the toughest.

On the first of April, 1982, halfway through the current recruiting year, the percentage of high school graduates among recruits for the combat arms stood at 81.2, more than double what it was in 1980. In 1980 only 17.6 percent of the Army's recruits were in the highest three aptitude areas. It has already hit 51.3 percent this year.

For the first time in a long while, too, the Army is able to be very selective about the people it permits to reenlist. Experienced soldiers with critical skills who, under different conditions in the civilian job market, might be looking for greener pastures, are "re-upping" at a comforting rate, solidifying the professionalism of the Army's senior enlisted ranks.

It is in the nation's best interest to turn the economy around. When that happens the Army will need not only to maintain its improved standards, but also to be able to rely on the continued help and support of the elected leadership in Congress and in the White House to provide conditions of pay and quality of life which will continue the present momentum.