
Defense Report

AUSA



Maintaining the Quality of Our Army—It will Require Some Very Special Effort

There is no escaping the conclusion that having our Army's ranks filled with capable people pays many dividends. High school graduation, for example, is one of several criteria used to measure the "quality" of a soldier. It has been shown, over and over again, that the soldier who graduates is more likely to complete his or her enlistment, less likely to be a disciplinary problem and will probably learn faster and perform better than his nongraduate peers.

With the help of a depressed economy and reinforced by a broad range of enlistment incentives, the Army's recent success in recruiting high school graduates has been little short of spectacular. In fiscal 1980 only 40.6 percent of the Army's recruits for its combat arms were high school graduates. This had more than doubled by the end of fiscal 1982 and, as of February, 1983, reached 86.7 percent. By comparison, the 1982 *World Almanac* reported that just 45.9 percent of the U.S. population between the ages of 19 and 24, and only 36.6 percent of the older population, had completed four years of high school. For the moment, then, the Army's recruits are educationally superior to the bulk of the population.

But two phenomena are occurring which will make the maintenance of this high standard increasingly difficult: the economy is obviously on the upswing and is bringing with it improved employment prospects; and the number of 17- to 21-year-old males, the prime target of military recruiters, is dropping off rapidly, reflecting the low birth rates in the late 1960s. Competition between recruiters for civilian employers and those for the armed services will intensify as the target population shrinks. It seems clear that this is not the time to withdraw support for the incentives that have contributed so largely to our recent military recruiting success.

The Reagan Administration's proposed cap on military pay suggests that the commander in chief and his agents are willing to risk the possible negative effects on recruiting and retention of such an action. This is not the time to be taking that sort of risk.