
Defense Report

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The Army's Ranks are Filling With More and Better People — How Long Can It Last?

Since its inception a decade ago, the all-volunteer Army has been engaged in an uphill struggle to attract and retain quality people in the numbers needed. Throughout the 1970s, recruiting of high school graduates ranged well below 70 percent of new enlistees (some years below 60 percent) and shortfalls against recruiting goals were common.

But, for a lot of reasons, the Army has recently been getting and keeping more and better people. From all aspects 1983 was a banner year for Army recruiters. Of 132,700 new enlistees, nearly 88 percent were high school graduates, with 65 percent registering scores in the upper half of tested mental categories. All recruiting goals for the year were met.

Recruiting success from 1981 to the present is a reflection of a more positive public image of military service, economic conditions created by the recent recession, and a more aggressive search for quality youth on the part of Army recruiters.

However, there are some storm clouds on the horizon. Improved economic conditions offer job opportunities for young people who might otherwise choose to enlist in the Army. Even more significant is the decrease in the youth pool eligible for recruitment from about 17.5 million 20-year-olds in 1980 to an estimated 15.5 million today.

An indication of coming problems surfaced in the first three months of 1984 in the lessening numbers of people contacting recruiters for information concerning enlistment. Also, there is some slippage in the number of new contracts for delayed entry into the Army. By the end of May this pool of talent was almost 23 percent short of the goal. Fortunately, the Army still has a sizable pool of delayed entry contracts from which it can draw to meet present objectives.

The Army steadfastly intends to maintain its improved personnel standards. To do so it must rely on the continued help and support of Congress and the Administration to provide the necessary incentives such as the Army College Fund, the G.I. Bill and enlistment bonuses, in order to continue to attract top quality recruits to be all they can be in the Army.