

**Winning the Recruiting  
Close Battle:  
Solutions to  
the Current Shortfalls**

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## Introduction

Without recruiting success, boot camps will not exist. Without boot camps, Armed Services will cease to exist. The United States military is attempting to recruit a 21<sup>st</sup> Century force with 20<sup>th</sup> Century doctrine, regulations, and mind sets. Archaic methods of enlisting an all volunteer force must be updated to compete with multiple societal manpower demands on a finite population. Recruiting and retention shortfalls will continue to haunt end strength planners and senior leaders alike, until recruiting methods are revised to reflect the modern demographics within which the services must compete. This paper examines four short term upgrades to enhance the services' recruiting programs and regain lost ground from the past few years of personnel shortfalls caused by a combination of missed recruiting quotas and declining retention rates, particularly among first term enlistees. Longer term solutions to recruiting and retention issues will need to be tailored to address the uncertain future and missions for the Department of Defense. The services are currently manning to a decade old force structure, modeled to support a "two major theater war" requirement. Times have changed.

The initial euphoria over our Cold War victory led to many profound changes in the way the nation viewed the defense establishment. The fracturing of the Soviet Union, continued strength of NATO, and the rush to become more westernized by former Warsaw Pact nations all pointed toward an opportunity to garner a domestic peace dividend from a military without a mission. The overwhelming superiority exhibited against Saddam Hussein's battle hardened army was almost too successful. Although public support for troops in the Gulf War was high, the ease with which the U.S. routed Iraqi forces reinforced the idea that our conventional strength was more than adequate to face both current challenges and threats of the foreseeable future.

Because no peer competitor looms on the horizon, U.S. Armed Forces are struggling to devise organizational structures and operational concepts capable of adapting to an indistinct threat. Inability to articulate the threat makes difficult the job of convincing political leaders of the need to maintain and modernize a large standing force in peacetime. John Lehman, former Secretary of the Navy, writes, “The history of this country is one of great reluctance to resort to arms, ferocious prosecution once engaged, and euphoric disarmament following victory.”<sup>1</sup> Whether or not such disarmament sows the seeds, as he suggests, of the next war, the deterrent effect of a robust military cannot be discounted, nor can the fact that peacetime disarmament required resorting to a wartime draft for every major conflict this country has had prior to the Gulf War.

After several years of rhetoric championing the unqualified success of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF), recent remarks from a variety of analysts, civilian governmental leaders and military officials indicate growing concern over recruiting problems, retention figures, and general force readiness. Many factors might cause the audience to question how this can be. In fact, the Joint Chiefs were recently asked these very questions in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee. The post-Cold War drawdown has taken the force from over 2.2 million to just 1.4 million people, seemingly cutting drastically into the demand for replacements. The number of high school graduates versus non-graduates enlisting has steadily increased, indicating a more competitive selection process among volunteers. That a high school diploma connotes higher quality is also supported by the statistic that 70 percent of recent recruits scored above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile of nationally representative samples of 18 to 23 years olds on the Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery test (ASVAB).<sup>2</sup> Yet warning signs are emerging which point to near term readiness issues centering on both recruiting shortfalls and retention problems. These problems are not limited to the enlisted ranks. While current Air Force and growing Navy pilot retention concerns are the most widely reported, recent articles in both defense publications and the mainstream press point to growing discontent with a military career among professionally competent and competitive junior officers of all warfare specialties. It is easy to assume that pilots get out when the airlines are hiring, but the scarcity of positions in the civilian world for ship or tank drivers should cause a deeper inquiry into dissatisfaction with military life.

The dominance of technology in the U.S. economy has brought benefits to the nation and advanced capabilities to the military. However, this new economic trend adds complexity to an already strained recruiting environment. Potential economic woes in world markets, such as recessions in the Pacific Rim, volatile oil prices, and instability of the euro-markets, have underscored the interdependence of global economies and the fragility of many governmental structures in developing countries. The lack of widespread panic in U.S. financial markets seems to indicate a basic belief that the gains in recent times will continue. Assuming the U.S. continues to reap the benefits of having shifted to an information-based economy, the demand for talent employable in the high tech and computer-based companies which fuel it will increase dramatically. This talent will come from the same pool that supplies our armed forces. The ebb and flow of U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> John Lehman, "Our Military Condition," The American Spectator, October 1998, pg 24.

<sup>2</sup> 1997 Annual Defense Report.

economic vitality will continue to impact recruiting for volunteers. Ironically, a recessed economy provides greater opportunity for recruiting. As the military strives to capitalize on the same information technologies that are having such dramatic impact on the business and financial world, the need for increasingly educated and sophisticated personnel to use and maintain these new systems will also increase. An achievable balance is desired in order to keep the U.S. prosperous and the services fully manned.

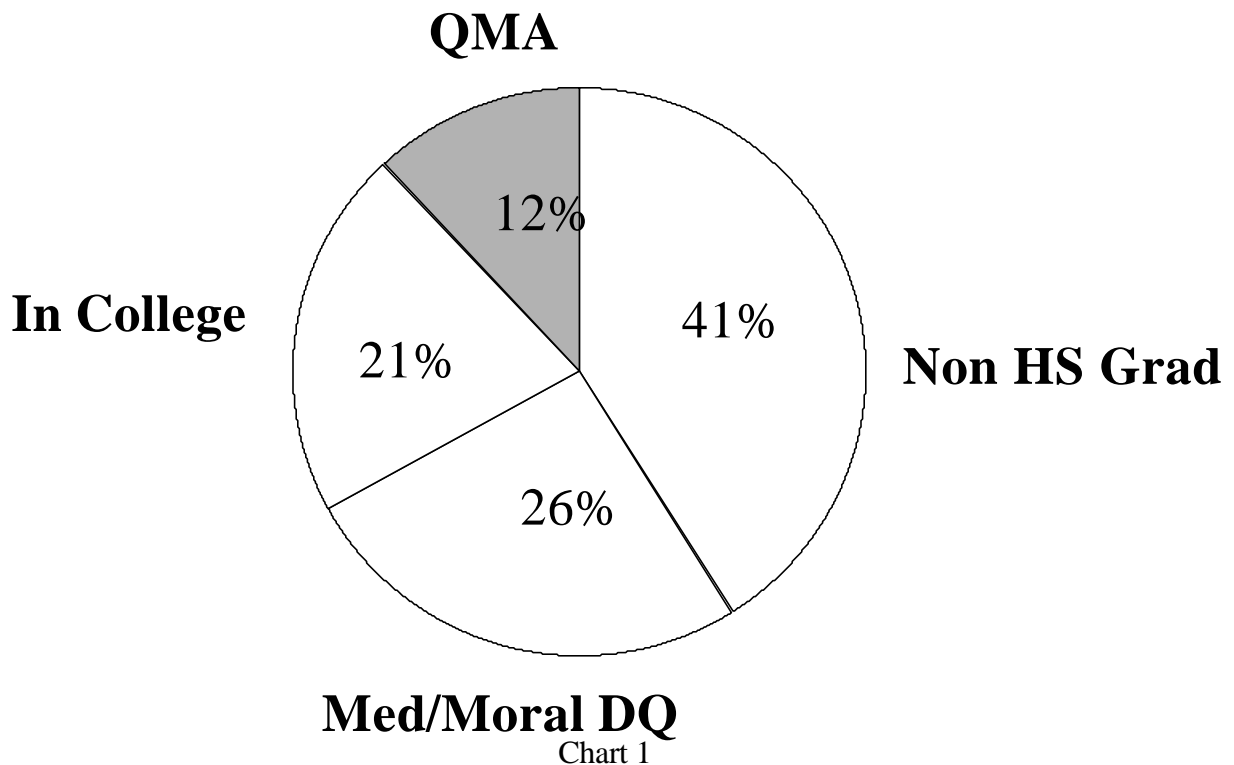
At the same time, close examination of demographics reveals some disruptive trends. Birth rates are declining as women have fewer children later in life. An increasingly longer-lived population will require larger lifetime investments to ensure long term well being, and that may translate into increased taxes. This effort will be the responsibility of the peers of the force of 2020 and beyond. These economic pressures, and a desire to maintain or improve on the lifestyle in which this generation matures, may make a military career increasingly unattractive. The services may not need to wait until 2020 for problems to arise. The FY 97 Defense Department Youth Attitude Tracking Study indicates a downward turn in the propensity of youth to enlist, reintroducing a decline that had abated somewhat in the two years prior.

The recent drawdown, possible further forced reductions in personnel, and the attitudes of dissatisfaction expressed by many who are voluntarily leaving the service may have unintended consequences for long term future recruiting. Less exposure to the military in the general populace may breed nothing more than ignorance, but negative images formed through association with those who have been forced out or left due to job dissatisfaction are bound to lessen the desirability to embark on a military career if a young person has no balancing view of military life. Another concern raised frequently is the decline in numbers of veterans in business, government, and the general population, which is propagating a dangerous gap in civil-military relations. That our legislative branch is rapidly losing veteran members raises fears that military forces may be misused, abused, or dangerously weakened. Fewer businesses that consider military experience an asset because of ignorance of the edge in maturity, teamwork and leadership skills that a veteran can bring to the organization. As a result, recruiters are unable to place as much emphasis on the future value of service to this nation.

Recruiting shortfalls in FY 99 re-ignited concern that the recruiting environment and United States demographics were in a transition and that our recruiting standards did not accurately reflect the average American citizen. Finding qualified military applicants is a demanding mission, which must be accomplished for service specific survival. Development of successful tactics, doctrines, and policies continue to plague efforts of the Department of Defense and the services' recruiting commands to meet their personnel requirements, under the restraints of an all volunteer force.

Increasing personnel accession requirements and shortfalls in the Air Force, Navy, and Army recruiting programs are not new. Shortfalls in new accessions have been projected during each of the last three years. One variable that continues to thwart recruiters and services' recruiting planners is the Qualified Military Available (QMA) market (young Americans between the ages of 18-23). This is a limited market with a

finite number of young people who can be sold on joining the military service, and worse, this market is becoming smaller. FY 99 QMA figures show that of the 18.9 million young Americans between the ages of 17 and 21, only 1.4 million will be qualified for military service. Statistics show that approximately 41 percent of the youth population will be disqualified as a non high school graduate, or will not pass the ASVAB with at least a 30 percentile. Additionally, 26 percent of this target population will be disqualified for medical, moral, or drug usage histories that preclude service. Of the remaining 33 percent, two thirds will already be enrolled in higher educational pursuits, which compete strongly with options for military service. The end result is a limited population resource (12% or 1.4 million personnel), within which all U.S. companies compete for personnel accessions to fill their ranks (see chart 1). A statistically disturbing trend is that this market population will grow at only 2.9 percent by 2010, while the requirements for military recruiting indicate a growth of 7-17 percent.<sup>3</sup> Lower retention rates and higher recruit training attrition account for this increase in recruiting effort through 2010.



In the short term (3-5 years), one viable alternative is to maximize the available QMA market, so that every person contacted has a better than average chance of enlisting in the military force. By revising medical qualifications, updating the quality standards for applicants entering the service, reducing recruit training attrition, and developing a robust advertising program, short-term gains can be achieved in the recruiting field. These four subject areas were chosen because they can be readily revised without

<sup>3</sup> Briefing: "Manning the Army of the Future," COL Greg Parleir, 30 June 1999.

instituting chaotic changes in the recruiting force structure and, if implemented, will yield results within a recruiting quarter. These short term approaches will at least slow the bleeding, but the underlying problem requires long-term solutions, such as reducing first term attrition and developing a strategic framework to build a 2010 force. Recommendations for long-term revisions are contained in the last section of this paper.

## Medical Regulations

One way to improve success on the recruiting battlefield is to ensure that every applicant processed for enlistment has a better than average chance of being mentally, morally, and physically qualified for enlistment. This is known in the recruiting business as “screening.” Before investing precious time and resources in processing an applicant for enlistment, the objective is to identify those individuals with no chance of making the grade. If an individual passes all of the screening criteria (acceptable levels of: police involvement, drug usage, estimated score on the ASVAB, and educational level), then an appointment for processing at the local Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) is scheduled. All screening, documentation, verification, and consent for enlistment must be prepared before an applicant is deemed morally and mentally fit and can enter the MEPS system for a full physical examination, the final processing step. A recruiter spends days, sometimes weeks, preparing an applicant for this final step of the enlistment process.

Medical (physical) standards for enlistment tend to fluctuate over time. The services have historically relaxed medical standards during periods of national emergency, in order fill its ranks. In times of drawdown, when the military can choose to be more selective, military enlistment standards become more stringent. The current regulation governing “Medical Qualifications for Enlistment” is Department of Defense regulation DoD 6130.3 signed in May 1994. This regulation, now over five years old, was published during the height of the 1992-1994 Department of Defense drawdown and it contains thousands of physical conditions that disqualify applicants from enlistment. Current medical qualification standards are extremely strict. Although a new DoD 6103.3 draft regulation is awaiting signature by the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, it falls far short of the changes required to make a significant difference.

Physical standards supposedly exist to ensure the welfare and safety of the applicant. Pulmonary, cardiovascular, and neurological standards have not and should not be relaxed. However, several physical criteria could be relaxed without increasing risk of injury to the applicant. Furthermore, this move would greatly increase the number qualified to enlist in the armed services. Three such categories will be reviewed in this section: upper extremity flexibility, hearing, and vision. Currently, these disqualifications are only marginally revised in the new DoD 6103.3 regulation.

Table I below represents permanently disqualified (PDQ) statistics from the Boston area MEPS, typical of the 55 MEPS throughout the country. The Boston MEPS completed 6,313 physicals on applicants in FY 98, out of which 790 applicants, or 12.5

percent, were disqualified. In the first half of FY 99, the MEPS completed 3,243 physicals and found 405 applicants disqualified for military service, again 12.5 percent of the total. Of the disqualified applicants in FY 98, 232 were found permanently disqualified within three categories: 75 for inadequate upper extremity flexibility, 84 for hearing loss, and 73 for poor eye sight, totaling 29 percent of the disqualified applicants in FY 98. The numbers rose slightly in the first half of FY 99, with 37 upper extremity, 49 hearing, and 36 eyesight PDQs, for a 30.1 percent accounting of the 405 disqualifications.<sup>4</sup> One additional observation is that this reporting format has a distinct 1960s era look that probably reflects medical statistical analysis developed three decades ago.

The Boston MEPS is a typical processing station and its PDQ rates represent the national average. Multiplying by 55 then yields approximately 43,500 applicants who were disqualified for medical conditions in FY 98. Of those, approximately 12,700 were disqualified for the three categories discussed. Assuming they were otherwise qualified, the Army may have been able to meet its recruiting goal by simply relaxing these criteria. A closer review of these three disqualification categories reveals that none of the conditions involved would actually lead to an adverse impact on an individual if enlisted, nor would their presence in the service impair the readiness of the force.

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<sup>4</sup> Boston Military Entrance Processing Station, FY 98-99 Processing Statistics.

## PDQ

	1ST QTR FY98	2ND QTR FY98	3RD QTR FY98	4TH QTR FY98	1ST QTR FY99	2ND QTR FY99
WEIGHT	5	5	8	9	12	5
VASCULAR	2	3	11	1	1	1
URINARY	3	2	4	3	5	10
UPPER EXT.	9	23	20	13	12	25
SPINE	3	3	2	3	0	1
SKIN	13	7	7	8	3	6
SINUS	0	0	0	0	0	0
PULSE	9	14	15	11	14	13
PSYCHOL	13	14	27	19	16	24
PREGNANCY	0	2	6	6	0	9
PELVIC	0	3	3	2	0	0
NEUROLOGY	2	5	7	6	6	3
NARCOTIC	4	5	6	3	10	7
MOUTH	0	0	1	2	0	0
LUNGS	9	13	12	15	6	11
LOWER EXT	15	20	20	16	21	18
HEIGHT	2	1	2	2	1	1
HEART	4	3	2	2	1	0
HEARING	20	23	16	25	23	26
HEAD/FACE	0	2	0	1	0	1
GU SYSTEM	1	3	14	4	3	9
FEET	10	11	10	7	5	11
EYES	12	24	15	22	20	16
ENDOCRINE	2	2	0	2	0	0
EARS	6	0	7	4	3	3
EKG	0	0	0	0	0	0
DENTAL	0	1	0	0	0	0
BUILD	1	0	0	0	0	0
BLOOD TYPE	0	0	0	0	0	0
BLOOD PRES	11	9	12	8	13	19
ANUS/RECTAL	0	0	2	0	0	0
ALCOHOL	0	0	0	0	0	0
ABDOMEN	5	2	2	4	6	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>224</b>
<b>TOTAL PHYS</b>	<b>1564</b>	<b>1655</b>	<b>1524</b>	<b>1570</b>	<b>1534</b>	<b>1709</b>

TABLE I

The “Upper Extremity” or joint flexibility qualification is the most unique. “An individual shall be considered unacceptable if the joint ranges of motion are less than the measurements listed below: Shoulder-forward elevation to 90 degrees, abduction to 90 degrees; Elbow-flexion to 100 degrees, extension to 15 degrees; Wrist-A total range of 60

degrees.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, the applicant is disqualified if he/she cannot rotate the shoulder or extend the arm to a near full extension, when placed on a flat surface. This category unfairly targets athletes, weight lifters, and others who have developed muscle structures in their upper bodies beyond that of the average American and, unfortunately, these are the applicants the services most desire to enlist. Athletes often possess teamwork, leadership skills, and physical fitness which compliments the service missions. The potential these applicants offer to the service far outweighs the minor loss of flexibility. The most common medical reason for the disqualification is the applicant’s inability to execute a fully extended push-up or pull-up during a physical fitness test. In practice, each service requires the physical fitness test to be monitored by evaluators who determine whether the applicant has correctly executed the repetition on the exercise correctly. If the applicant cannot physically extend the elbow fully, the range of motion is noted and used as a baseline for each repetition. This particular category for disqualification is a hold over from the drawdown era of recruiting and should be relaxed, with no adverse consequence to, and very possibly a positive impact on, the services and the applicants.

The hearing category is more complicated and just as perplexing to recruiters and applicants. The specifications for an applicant to pass the hearing test are very narrow. “The cause for rejection for appointment, enlistment, and induction is a hearing threshold level greater than that described in paragraph E.1.c: Acceptable Audiometric Hearing Levels are-pure tone at 500, 1000, and 2000 cycles per second of not more than 30dB on the average (either ear), with no individual level greater than 35dB at these frequencies...pure tone level not more than 45dB at 3000 cycles per second each ear, and 55dB at 4000 cycles per second each ear.”<sup>6</sup> Hearing loss most common in our American society is at the center range of frequencies (1000/35dB), which loud music (headphones), aging, and normal daily exposure to the noise of vehicles, aircraft, and gas engines inflict. Roughly 15 percent of all medical disqualifications fall within this range of hearing loss. Paradoxically, this is the same range frequency that deteriorates while the member is on active duty, due to loud noises of weapons firing, aircraft, heavy equipment operation, and pressurization, either in the air or underwater. In short, enlistment regulations require near perfect hearing, which during an initial tour of active duty will be degraded even if hearing protection is used. The current hearing standards could be relaxed to allow for normal societal hearing loss. Furthermore, the current hearing standards should represent an average over the entire spectrum, vice the current specificity within singular frequencies. This change would allow applicants to be evaluated against reasonable hearing standards prevalent among our society and would not adversely impact the services or the applicant.

Finally, eye sight or vision standards have also taken a dramatic toll on qualifying applicants for enlistment. The visual acuity standards are set for specific functions and should remain. The last section dealing with laser eye surgery is becoming a new obstacle to recruiting, unforeseen when the regulation was written. The regulation states:

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<sup>5</sup> DoD Regulation 6130.3, dtd 2 May 1994, page 1-8.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., page 1-7.

“The causes for medical rejection for appointment, enlistment, and induction are listed...Distant Visual Acuity-Distant visual acuity of any degree that does not correct with spectacle lenses to at least one of the following: 20/40 in one eye and 20/70 in the other eye; 20/30 in one eye and 20/100 in the other eye; 20/20 in one eye and 20/400 in the other eye. Additionally, any refractive error in the spherical equivalent of worse than -8.00 or +8.00 diopters; or if ordinary spectacles cause discomfort by reason of ghost images, prismatic displacement, etc; if an ophthalmological consultation reveals a condition that is disqualifying; or if refractive error is corrected by orthokeratology or keratorefractive surgery”.<sup>7</sup>

Laser eye surgery is becoming more commonplace and popular within our society, yet the military will not accept those who have undergone the procedure. Not enough research exists on the effects of abnormal pressure on a surgically altered eye. Some steps have been taken to change this disqualification, but large numbers of applicants continue to be disqualified, or referred to lengthy consults to determine acceptability for enlistment. Vision is another category that must be updated to reflect current population attitudes and trends, with no adverse impact on the services or the applicant. Only in certain warfare specialties where the eye is exposed to much greater than normal pressures should caution be exercised, and each community (aviation, for example) is free to apply more stringent qualifications on service members.

Proponents of the DoD Regulation for Medical Qualifications insist that the categories are fair and beneficial to the services and applicants. The Surgeon General and Defense Medical Officers point out that the services retain the right to waive certain disqualifications and allow enlistment if deemed in the best interest of the individual and the service. However, these waivers are complex, tedious, and lengthy. The average Bureau of Medicine (BUMED) waiver for the Naval Service takes in excess of six months. For six months, the applicant and recruiter are in limbo, awaiting a board's decision on the fate of the applicant. At the end of the six months, hundreds of hours of documentation and effort have been expended on one applicant, whose exposure to the bureaucratic ways of the military may easily destroy the motivation to enlist. In reality, only one out of three BUMED waivers are approved. If the applicant is still available at the end of the six months, it usually means the service is their last resort. Many times, job opportunities or educational pursuits have lured the applicant away, resulting in zero return for a huge investment of time and effort. After investing the effort in a BUMED waiver, a recruiter may be convinced that in time it will be approved, giving the false sense that the applicant will be “qualified for enlistment”, and interfere with prospecting efforts for new applicants. After all, why should the recruiter work harder to find new applicants if he is already convinced there are two or three in the works? Thus, daily recruiting activities drop resulting in future deficits, as well as low morale when the waivers are returned disapproved. In short, the lures of medical waivers at the service level are more of a hindrance than help.

Current accounting at nationwide MEPS does not provide the detail of specificity needed to calculate the increased enlistments if the three disqualification categories were

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<sup>7</sup> DoD Regulation 6130.3, dtd 2 May 94, page 1-16.

relaxed. Upper extremity and hearing categories are the most obvious for accounting the specific disqualification. If relaxing these physical qualification standards only allows one third of the disqualified to become qualified, then 4,225 additional applicants would be enlisted today.

## Quality Standards

Quality standards, like the medical regulations, are also outdated. Quality standards were developed and enforced by the individual services to provide boundaries for the operation of their recruiting force, to reduce delayed entry program and recruit training attrition, and to measure the quality of applicants entering the All Volunteer Force. High school diplomas, mental group categories, waivers, attrition, and performance at recruit training are some of the statistics maintained to guide recruiters during the monthly search for qualified applicants. Each recruiter and recruiting station has a report card, with various quality indicators to analyze. Additionally, these categories are used in congressional testimony, to attest to the quality of personnel recruited within the service.

One proposal is to reduce the number of quality standards that restrict an already constrained personnel market. The services use this tactic when recruiting results do not meet the total recruiting requirement. In a limited market, economists suggest placing as few restrictions as possible on the sales force in order to make maximum utilization of available resources. This makes sense in the recruiting business as well. Some of our current quality standards are holdovers from decades past, when the services were culling the first wave of volunteers. This group included those service personnel without a high school diploma, those who failed the ASVAB, and convicts (some serving their sentence in the service), all plentiful in the post-Vietnam all volunteer force. Quality standards were seen as necessary for the services and bound the recruiting force within specific quality markets.

The only two quality standards that should remain are the high school diploma and applicant attrition (from either the Delayed Entry Program (DEP) or recruit training). In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, American society emphasizes education to support our increasingly complex and technological growth. If we must, by law, recruit a minimum of 90 percent high school graduates<sup>8</sup>, then by law this should be the primary quality standard. High school graduates have a proven record of accomplishing a four year program and have met the standards for graduation. Qualifying non high school graduates for enlistment will take more recruiter time and the applicant additional twelfth grade instruction in order to qualify for enlistment. The non high school graduate market presents a quick fix for shortfalls in personnel, but usually requires more detailed screening and an applicant potential to complete twelfth grade courses. This quick fix should be reserved for only the extreme circumstances, such as survival of a service's end strength. If the recruiting force remains in the graduate market, all the other standards become irrelevant. By enforcing just two quality standards, the emphasis on the recruiting force will be to enlist and train the required quantity of recruits, plus ensure the recruits graduate from training.

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<sup>8</sup> FY 97 Defense Authorization Bill.

This is the recruiting mission. Of all the other categories of quality, the single quality standard that has outlived its purpose is the mental group percentage, and this standard could be relaxed or removed to allow higher quantity and maintain the current quality of the force.

The aggregate mental group percentage is one of the quality standards that could be relaxed or even discarded as a measure of recruiting success. The current quality standard for the recruiting force in the mental group percentages is 63 percent Tier I-III Alpha. This means that two out of every three enlistments score in the top (50 or above) on the ASVAB test. As stated in the introduction, statistically 75 percent of all high school graduates score a 50 or above on the ASVAB (Tier I-III A) when tested. Deductive reasoning would lead one to assume that if the recruiting force remained in the pure high school graduate market, this mental group quality standard should be irrelevant. However, this is not the case. The arbitrary 63 percent has been a standard since 1980. The effects this has on the recruiting force is more constricting than enlisting only high school graduates.

The result of the mental group quality standard is that many high school graduates are turned away if they score a 49 or below, until two 50 or above applicants are enlisted. The individual scores are extremely important for career field qualifications, duty assignments, and professional growth within the service, and should remain as an individual tool for assignment to positions. But, the ASVAB is only one of several indicators of recruit quality. The classification of "Alpha" or "Bravo" has become a quality field unto itself, taking away the individual recruiter's ability to apply good judgment on who will make the best enlistee. Currently, to qualify a non high school graduate the applicant must be an Alpha and demonstrate potential for future performance in the service. This appears backwards from a quality viewpoint. We should enlist high school graduates and dispense with the aggregate mental group percentage as a report card. Furthermore, the label B, applied to all who score 30 to 49 on the test, becomes a badge of shame for some recruits. The stigma of "Bravohood" often follows those recruits who do enlist through boot camp and beyond. B category recruits have higher attrition rates than Alphas, but this may well have as much to do with the restrictions on future career options which go along with it, as on their ability or desire to perform. By discarding an old mental classification method and maintaining a graduate market, the services will be able to maintain acceptable quality standards and open the market to the "Bravos" otherwise turned away. In reality, there is little difference from an applicant that scores 45 on the ASVAB when compared to the applicant that scored 50. There is a greater difference from a high school graduate and a non graduate.

The mental group categorization is just one of the many quality standards that should be reviewed to determine relevancy. If we consider the presence of quality standards vital to the recruiting force's efforts, then every standard must be relevant to the service's mission and recruiting goals, not a floating standard that is in effect only when recruiting is good. There are two standards, which if left in force as the "sole quality indicators," could provide flexibility for the services, yet direct recruiters in a positive

direction to seek out the “quality” the all volunteer force requires. As stated, the first is a high school diploma (this standard alone has raised the quality of the force) and the second is attrition. The services want high school graduates completing their first term of enlistment, period. Currently, the high school diploma is a quality standard; attrition, however, is recorded as a measure of effectiveness. If reducing recruit attrition is the goal, then reduced attrition should be the quality standard. Recruiters do not plan for attrition, but due to their hectic monthly recruiting efforts, they look for the easiest way to sell an applicant quickly. When the service training experience is not what the applicant thought it should be, he/she decides to return home. This applies before they leave for the training center and as well as after they arrive. Recruiters can plan on spending more time informing the applicant of the enlistment and preparing them for the day they depart for training. If enforced, attrition from the DEP will be reduced, more recruits will graduate from recruit training, thereby accomplishing the recruiting mission with two key quality standards. Inserting other quality indicators, other than a diploma and attrition, fogs the battlefield and allows for reduced recruiter accountability.

Simply put, if a recruiter understands that only one out of ten of the enlistees can attrite (either in the delayed entry program or at recruit training), and that standard is how he is evaluated for success, then the recruiter will strive to meet that quality standard. The recruiter will ensure that every applicant is ready to graduate from training, before shipped, and will avoid a fast sell if it means paying the price in attrition later. Levying other quality indicators in the program just gives a recruiter false success indicators, which may ultimately interfere with achieving the stated goal of reducing attrition. They will succeed in producing “high quality” mental groups, all high school graduates, and meet the other plethora of quality standards, but will ultimately fail if attrition rates continue to soar. Attrition causes an exponential increase in the recruiting effort, which at some point will increase beyond our accession capability.

## Recruit Training Attrition

Closely aligned with medical and quality standards are the physical qualifications to complete recruit training, once an applicant is “shipped” or transported to the prospective service basic training course. Recruits are being discharged from recruit training at an alarming rate, many under the official guise of pre-existing or incurred medical conditions, which prevent the recruit from continuing basic training. In reality, only a small portion of recruit training attrition is directly attributable to injury or a pre-existing medical condition. The fact is the recruit quits, does not want to complete training, and wants to go home. With the current trends in recruit attrition, the job of the recruiter will only become more difficult. This translates into finding and shipping more applicants to boot camps in order to gain the required end strengths in each service. The old standard of being able to drop one recruit out of four, 25 percent, has to be reevaluated.

Yet, recruit training attrition is a direct result of the recruiting force’s efforts to make up past years’ shortfalls. Currently, the recruiting service is in a “direct market,”

which means an applicant is found, sold, screened, scheduled, and shipped to recruit training in a matter of days or weeks. The cycle continues, as this recruit has a change of heart (once a haircut and two days without sleep set in) while at the training center and wants to revoke his contract through any means necessary. This “recruit failure” returns home, with negative impressions of the service, as a possible “hostile proof source” or belligerent to future recruiting efforts. The line number the recruit was suppose to fill in the service is still empty. So, the service assigns that same line number to be recruited again next month. The ideal way to recruit qualified applicants is to process the applicant for enlistment, and once qualified, enlist the applicant into a DEP where the future recruit will have six to nine months for physical conditioning, instruction, and preparation for recruit training. The current methods of recruiting in a direct market and the effects of the attrition cycle are dangerous, unreliable, and will ultimately lead to disaster for the recruiters and the services.

There is no immediate solution to increased recruit training attrition. The recruiting service must first get out of the direct market. A short term fix may be to more effectively screen and hold recruit training failures longer at the training facility to determine the cause of failure. This will provide time for indoctrination courses on the service for which they enlisted and enable the training command to determine if the recruit has potential to contribute to the service or should ultimately be discharged. Many recruits, who are “slammed and jammed” to recruit training have no conception of the service they joined. A one week required indoctrination course could provide the recruit an opportunity to reconsider the decision to quit. At a minimum, the indoctrination course should provide information on the capabilities of the specific service, and how it provides for our national security. The goal of this additional step is to allow the recruit time to reconsider the decision to quit. Should the recruit stick by the decision to leave, it has the added benefit of possibly removing some of the negativity the recruit experienced before returning home. Some recruit training failures have had such a negative experience that they act as an adverse proof source to other applicants. There are no documented studies on the effects of a citizen returning to the home of record and acting as a belligerent to other enlistees. However, from recruiters’ conversations and experience, the fewer disgruntled people in their community or recruiting area the better. If the services “turn” or resell only one out of five in this process to remain and graduate, it is still one less the recruiting force has to make up at year’s end.

More aggressive approaches could be pursued, but would require changes in law and funding. For example, the recruit could be required to stay for the entire period of recruit training, even if a decision to drop has been made. The individual ships to recruit training knowing that quitting before course end is not an option. The recruit leaves after the specified time as a service member, or civilian, but stays the entire period. Training failures could provide the working parties and clean up details that are currently contracted, or performed by other recruits with a desire to graduate. Or, if the recruit decides to drop, he/she is not discharged for a period of 90 days, but returns home to the delayed entry program. This holds the recruiter accountable and could provide another opportunity for the recruit to prepare for a “second chance” at graduating. Innovation is the key. Obviously discretion and judgement need to be applied in cases where the

recruit cannot adapt to military service. Regardless, recruit training failures are expensive, time consuming, and result in zero gain for the services. This is an area of concern that cannot continue with the “business as usual” mind set.

The ultimate long term goal is to reduce recruit attrition to a bare minimum. Each service has its own range of acceptable losses. To reduce attrition at the training centers, most of the recommendations previously mentioned must be in place. The revisions suggested in this paper will provide a short term fix for the overall shortfalls in accessions, and provide the lead time to properly prepare an applicant for the rigors of a service training center. The process by which the training centers discharge training failures must be revisited by each service. It should be easier to graduate from training than to quit. Currently, that is not the case, and the services allow too many recruits to violate their signed contract and solemn oath to the United States.

## Advertising

Advertising is both a short term solution and long term investment. It is also service specific in message development and timing. General concepts are presented here for consideration as a supporting effort and future planning asset. Advertising and service funding become the force multiplier for the recruiting service. Short term advertising should be focussed on attracting 17-23 year old Americans for service to their country. Long term advertising must take the form of an information campaign directed at a different market, such as younger Americans and parents, who can be informed of military service benefits along with the other options of college and job markets when finished with high school. To successfully meet increasing recruiting quotas both short and long term advertising campaigns require attention.

The short term advertising objectives should specifically target the age qualified market and their parents. Ironically more funding has been allocated to advertising, but falls in the too little too late category. Increased advertising has started in the Army, Navy, and Air Force recruiting campaigns. The advertising messages need to continue well beyond meeting the initial quotas. This is a recurring lesson from the past. The recruiting force tends to flood a market with advertising until saturated and after achieving success backs off because of limited funding or a perceived market shift, such as high school senior markets or high school graduate markets. To be effective, advertising should be as constant as any other commercial campaign. A four year military choice is in direct competition with a four year college choice. As such, advertising must remain as constant as possible to influence youth career decisions as decision points emerge. For too long the services have recouped advertising dollars after achieving their quotas. Current recruiting struggles indicate that in the future, advertising needs to be as constant as other commercials in the media.

Long term advertising should be focussed as an information campaign, vice sales, at a younger aged market. Informational computer programs, mail in service stickers or

CD ROMs, and military visits to local grade schools need to become a portion of our recruiting routine. Currently, the services are trapped in a personnel accession market to meet shipping numbers, which negates any investment in time or resources to the long term campaign. The vicious cycle of limited monthly successes will not end unless a long term approach can be accomplished while meeting short term numbers. Both are needed for future recruiting achievement and require revision.

## Long Term Recommendations

Unless long term solutions are affected by the Department of Defense and the United States government as a whole, the services will never recover from their current personnel sourcing dilemma. On average, the services make their recruiting numbers each year by early shipping of applicants from the October pool to make September 30 and, therefore, fiscal year end strength numbers. These gaps in the shipping pool ripple throughout the year, ending the next year with a higher deficit and more October applicants shipping a month or two early. The cycle cannot go on forever. One long term solution is a continuous information program to inform parents and youngsters of the requirements for a strong defense and the benefits of serving in the military. A separate publication by Harvard Military Fellows highlights many long term, strategic recommendations to enhance the future recruiting effort and force.<sup>9</sup>

The last effective media campaign to boost military credibility was during the Gulf War, 1990-1991. During that period, every American knew the armed forces were ready to respond and admired the young men and women in uniform. Ten years later, little has been done to capitalize on this national level force multiplier. The military profession ranks on the upper scale of respect and trust for the American people, but the same audience believes the services do not need people. Why? The last national media coverage remembered by the nation was the draw down of forces in the early Clinton Administration years. The services have not gone back to the media and explained to the American public that, although reduced in size, the services are still in need of volunteers.

Advertising has to deliver the message that, despite changes since the Gulf War, the services still offer opportunities and benefits attractive to today's generation. The average 10 year old during the Gulf War is now in college and has had little exposure to positive coverage about the military. Long term advertising must concentrate nationally on educating parents and providing the information to school aged children on the benefits and honor of military service. Several avenues are available, to include the Internet, computer software programs, interactive video and games, and school visits by local active and retired service personnel. If the advertising campaign solely targets the 17-23 year old market, the campaign is too late. Most 17-23 year olds have already made decisions about their immediate future, and it will be spent in college or the work force. The services' long term information distribution must target the younger generation, to

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<sup>9</sup> "Strategic Recruiting," Harvard Military Fellows, May 2000.

ensure that the military service is considered early on as a possible future choice, in order to compete with college and other job market decisions.

Of equal importance to advertising is the national level direction required to determine the future roles of the services. If we continue to build the forces around a two major theater war scenario, and applicants sign up for the major war event, then they will become disenchanted quickly with the current operational tempo and missions assigned to the forces. A realistic vision needs to be published for 2000 through 2010, where peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and humanitarian relief operations will be the priority of effort. These strategic decisions, embodied in a new U. S. Military Strategy, will help tailor a post Cold War military structure that is more responsive and designed for the contingencies we face in the next decade. If published in advance of the advertising campaign, the message will sell the current force as relevant to meet the decade of challenges ahead. The long term effects will be market awareness at the earliest of ages and military service will be able to compete with other markets for the same population age group. Currently, our advertising campaigns are as old as the doctrine and regulations we recruit towards. Times have changed, and so must we.

## Summary

This paper recommends the following actions be taken by Department of Defense leaders to allow short term recruiting success in the quantity and quality of personnel required. Long term recommendations are provided to ensure growth of the recruiting effort throughout this decade. These recommendations compliment the “Strategic Recruiting” publication by the Harvard Military Fellows.

Recruiting will always be difficult. There are no magical sales pitches or gimmicks to entice young men and women to volunteer for a period of perceived sacrifice. The services will continue to conduct the daily battle of enlisting enough personnel to maintain their end strength. They have no other choice. If the Department of Defense adopts some of the recommendations of this paper, the military will be adapting itself to the realities of the post cold war world.

### Short term recommendations:

DoD can assist the recruiting force by allowing year 2000 armed forces applicants the chance to be screened and evaluated by realistic year 2000 medical standards. By relaxing specific physical qualifications, particularly upper extremity, hearing and eyesight, the services can maximize the target population pool that has matured in an increasingly competitive society, with tailored societal physical requirements. Once an applicant is “sold, screened, and scheduled” to enlist, nothing should stop the momentum, especially the three categories of minor physical limitations presented. Service medical waivers should be more expeditious in order to minimize delays in the enlistment process.

DoD should establish the minimal critical quality standards for the Armed Forces as a whole, mindful that every additional standard restricts the services to recruit to a small percentage of the available market. Focusing on a limited number of standards, we argue just a high school diploma and reduced attrition, will expand the boundaries of the recruiting force, produce a higher quality applicant, and focus the recruiter on the needs of the current all volunteer force.

Recruit training attrition requires immediate attention and could be solved by simply establishing a ten percent factor as a quality standard. It is currently easier to drop from training than to complete the requirements. If left unchecked, recruit training attrition poses a serious risk to the recruiting effort. Not only do the services have to replace the recruit training dropouts, but also the recruiters have to face a potential hostile proof source in their recruiting sector. It should be easier to graduate from training than to fail.

Advertising funds for the short term should be targeted at getting the service's message to 17-23 year olds and the parents of volunteer aged youths. The last media campaign by the services for America was during Desert Storm, with the last message transmitted culminating in a downsizing of the force. Advertising the current needs of the services is a necessity that has been neglected for too long. Advertising programs must assist in educating the American public, as well as meeting recruiting requirements.

#### Long term recommendations:

Long term changes will enable the services to meet their personnel requirements, but most are beyond the ability of military leaders. Changes in legislation, authority, pay and allowances, in service education, and the status of an honorable discharge are all in need of updating. A military strategy that honestly outlines the course of military engagements for the next decade is overdue. Funding for equipment and spare parts is needed for the members to perform their duties. An all volunteer force needs to believe that their military service is vital to national security. And finally, the young men and women ordered to participate as a U.S. force in conflicts around the globe should be trained in the missions they are assigned.

Long term information campaigns for service messages needs to educate the parents and middle school student audience. These young Americans are the future service men and women, with the support of their families. If the services do not reach the 4<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades and provide information on the benefits or contributions of a military career, then these students will enter high school with college as their preferred option. Funding needs to be available to provide information during youth formative years explaining military service and it's benefits to the nation, in order to provide a choice in future career decisions. Until the services begin to educate this long range personnel market, we will continue to fight the close in crisis battles of just barely meeting quotas.