

The Real Deal on Enlistment

What you need to know about military recruiters at your high school.

Text by Pittsburgh Organizing Group, a youth led, activist group, based in Pittsburgh PA.

Throughout the U.S. public school system military recruiters are targeting you and your friends. They have different strategies depending on the school: taking over gym classes to “guest teach,” setting up recruitment tables outside the cafeteria or guidance office, and even buying your teachers doughnuts and offering to help them with jobs duties in order to get easier access to YOU. You might be seeing the military’s ads on TV or hearing a recruiter brought in as a “guest” speaker in your class. They’re doing everything they can to convince you that the military is a good life choice.

We are an organization with another take on things. You might be sitting there thinking, but don’t these kids have their own agenda? Of course we do. Basically, we don’t support the war in Iraq, we don’t want to see any more of our friends coerced or tricked into killing and being killed. On a larger scale we disagree with a lot of the government’s current actions, and we try to work towards a world based on mutual-aid, peace, voluntary association, and human solidarity. We’re trying to be upfront about where we’re coming from. High school is a community and military recruitment at school is something that affects everyone. Part 1 addresses some of the distortions recruiters are making and provides info about the reality of military life, while Part 2 talks about larger themes we hope you’ll think about.

PART 1

What the Military isn’t telling you about enlistment

Where do you want your life to go after high school? Right now most likely you’re in one of three situations.

You think you know exactly what you want to do after you graduate and you have a plan to achieve it.

You think you know what you want to do, but aren’t sure how you can achieve it.

You have no clue what you’re going to do and you’re sick of everyone asking and/or telling you.

Well, in all those cases you’re probably sick of people “asking/telling you”, but no matter what your situation is, the military isn’t a good choice for your future.

The Myth of easy money for college

You’ve probably heard the hype, “\$70,000 for college through the Army GI bill!”

“Get your education paid for, etc.” The truth is the amounts aren’t what they’re made out to be. You probably won’t get any money, and if you do it won’t be free money because you’ll have worked hard for it.

Let’s break down the military’s exaggerations. Because of all the small print requirements to receive college benefits, **only 35% of enlistees receive any GI bill funds for college — only 15% of enlistees ever receive a college degree.** The average participant actually receives less money than a student who simply receives a Pell Grant and a Stafford Loan.

If you’re part of the 25% of enlistees who get dishonorably discharged you get... nothing.

If you’re part of the 33% who leave the military early you get... nothing.

If you later decide not to go to college you get... nothing.

Oh yeah, you also have to pay a **\$1,200** non-refundable deposit during your first year of service to even be eligible for the program, and that’s money you won’t get back if you end up getting nothing.

Take a vacation around the world!

Join the Army, travel to exciting places, meet new and different people - and kill them.

The Army says you’ll “travel the world.” Growing up in a small town or even a big one can make this a big draw. For every kid who’s a lifelong yinzer there’s another who understandably wants to see a bit more of the world. Enlistment in the guard, reserves, or army certainly means you won’t stay here for long, but are you sure that’s a good thing? Iraq is a place with a lot of interesting people and places, but you won’t be going there to sightsee. Maybe it’ll be a cakewalk, but it could just as easily be you riding around wearing heavy armor during 110 degree summers waiting to get shot at while local kids throw rocks and insults at you.

The “job training” myth

The military likes to claim that you’ll be getting “fun work in technology fields for the jobs of tomorrow.” Recruiters promise you training that will lead to better jobs in civilian life. Which sounds great, right? You get paid while someone else trains you. **Except that veterans typically earn 12% to 15% less than those workers who do not go into the military.**

Military training is designed for military jobs and most of the skills you do learn are particular to your military job. Only 12 percent of male veterans and 6 percent of female veterans report making any use of skills learned in the military in subsequent civilian jobs. To make it even worse, even if you do get trained in the field you requested, the military doesn’t have to use you in that field. You might

sign up to fly planes and end up being a mail clerk. Dick Cheney said it best, "The military is not a social welfare agency; it's not a jobs program."

Women in the military

A recent survey found **that 30% of women reported being victims of rape or attempted rape while in the military.** 75% reported being sexually harassed. Furthermore, survivors usually have little recourse when such crimes do occur. The machismo culture and closed environment of military life combined with threats and pressure from above makes it difficult to break the wall of silence.

Dude, Where's my rights?

If you leave your work without permission, you can be arrested.
Any disobedience can result in criminal punishment
You can be punished without the right to see a lawyer or have a trial
Your right to say what you think when and how you want will be restricted
Individual expression through the way you dress and wear your hair is restricted
You will be subject to routine urine tests for drugs

There's no promise like a government promise

The fine print on the back of the enlistment contract makes it clear that **no promise made by the government has to be kept.** The Military Enlistment/Reenlistment contract states: "The following statements [in the contract] are not promises or guarantees of any kind."

Indeed, in 1995 the Government stopped providing free healthcare for 20-year military retirees. This broke a promise made by recruiters (and in military brochures and advertisements) to generations of recruits. When veterans sued to force the government to fulfill its promise Bush's lawyers argued that it wasn't a legally binding promise because it had only been made by recruiters...

You're not out till they say you're out

Despite the stated length of enlistment, usually four years, recruits can be kept in the military indefinitely, or called back from the reserves many years later as is being seen with the current back door draft.

How to get recruiters off your back

Ever wonder where recruiters get so much personal information about you? Well, Federal Law means that your high school has to give them your personal information unless you say not to. Unfortunately many schools don't do an adequate job letting you know you can opt-out of releasing the info, thus avoiding some of those annoying calls and mailings to you and your parents. To print up

an opt-out form, go to <http://www.militaryfreeschools.org/forms.html> and return the form to your principal or administrator.

There are other options

No one can tell you what the right post-graduate option is for you. Finding your calling in life is not an easy thing. Ideally you'll find something personally rewarding that is also compatible with your monetary and spiritual needs. Too often however we end up taking the easy way out and following a future someone else has picked out for us. This is YOUR future, follow your dreams. Just because there isn't a non-military recruiter at school providing you info on how to get where you want to go doesn't mean the info and opportunities aren't out there.

For a full list of resources on post-high school options, whether that means continuing your education, serving your community, job training, or starting a career now, see www.organizepittsburgh.org

College: Don't assume you can't afford tuition. There's a lot of help out there. The less your family's income, the more grants and aid you'll likely receive. Major grant/aid programs [HYPERLINK "http://www.finaid.org/fafsa"](http://www.finaid.org/fafsa)

www.finaid.org/fafsa

Scholarships [HYPERLINK "http://www.college-scholarships.com/"](http://www.college-scholarships.com/) www.college-scholarships.com/

<http://www.collegeboard.com/pay/>

Serve your country

Job Corps: a no-cost education and vocational training program that helps young people 16-24 get a better job, make more money and take control of their life. <http://jobcorps.doleta.gov/students.cfm>

AmeriCorps: a network of national service programs that engage Americans in intensive service to meet critical needs in education, public safety, health, and the environment. <http://www.americorps.org/>

PART 2

Are you ready to kill? For a cause you don't believe in?

Taking a life is a heavy thing. Killing someone is a decision you'll have to live with forever, and it's one you can't take back. Do you want to kill simply because you're ordered to do so? Or because conditions are so stressful you snap? Or make a rash split-second decision? Are you willing to bomb people's homes and destroy their livelihoods? Do you want to be under orders to fire on cars that

don't realize they have to stop before reaching U.S. checkpoints? Do you want to be one of the many soldiers returning home saying they killed innocent people because they had to, or they didn't know or made a mistake?

Who controls your life?

Joining the military not only means you're legally obligated to do these things if ordered, it also means you'll be doing them with no control over why. Enlistment means giving up power and control over the most basic freedoms in life; what you eat, where you live, what you say, what you do after work, and more. It means simply that it isn't your life anymore.

Freedom of choice puts you in control

Right now none of us would kill someone if our parents, teachers, principle, or friends ordered us to, because we're independent thinkers. We may have to depend on someone for a bed to sleep in and some food to eat, but that doesn't mean we'd do *ANYTHING* they ordered us to. It's called freedom of choice and getting out of school and out on our own should mean we have even more of it, not less. Enlisting is like going back to grade school except you have a lot more "teachers" and a lot more things you have to do. Remember when your parents wanted you to do something and you wanted to know why? Or you didn't understand the point of it? Or you thought there was a better way to do it? The military means years of people yelling at you "because I told you so."

Do you always listen to what commercials tell you?

Of course not. Then shouldn't you be skeptical of the claims recruiters make? They're salespeople for the government! They pretend to be a "mentor, counselor, and coach" type figure, but in the end they exist solely to sell you the idea it's a cool, hip, important, future to sign away your life on the dotted line. They spend hundreds of millions on ads, glossy brochures, videos, free key chains, and other propaganda and schemes for one purpose: to make the military a brand you think you want.

Who's looking out for whom?

The recruiters at school along with thousands of others are **getting paid** to convince you to go risk dying for the decisions of rich politicians elected before you could even vote. They have a set quota of recruits they're required to "get" each month or they could get "reassigned," aka likely shipped off to Iraq. **1 in 5 recruiters is currently under investigation by the army** for things such as lying, cheating, deceiving and harassing recruits, sexual harassment, and other inappropriate behaviors, often engaged in for the purpose of meeting quota. The cases are disturbing; recruiters telling kids to lie about medical conditions that would disqualify them, recruiting a man fresh out of a 3-week stay in a psychiatric

ward, etc. Lie on your enlistment and it's you that will be in trouble later. Agree to hide a medical condition and you're the one who could be injured or die later. The recruiters won't be around to live with the consequences so don't let them pretend they're doing you a favor now.

What we hope you get out of this

This is far too short to address all the relevant issues about enlistment and military recruitment. Our hope is that presenting you with alternative information (compared to what you're normally bombarded with) will encourage you to find about more while spurring debate among you and your friends.

Links for more info

For more information on our efforts see **HYPERLINK**
"http://www.organizepittsburgh.org" www.organizepittsburgh.org.

*Statistics cited: **HYPERLINK** "http://www.organizepittsburgh.org/stats"
www.organizepittsburgh.org/stats*

*News about CR: **HYPERLINK** "http://www.CounterRecruiter.net"
www.CounterRecruiter.net*

*Underground Alliance: **HYPERLINK** "http://www.militaryfreezezone.org"
www.militaryfreezezone.org*

*Military Families Speak Out: **HYPERLINK** "http://www.mfso.org/" www.mfso.org/*

*GI Rights: **HYPERLINK** "http://girights.objector.org/" <http://girights.objector.org/>*

GI Rights Hotline: 800-394-9544