

## WHAT ARE SOME THINGS I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT MILITARY LIFE?

Do you enjoy having someone constantly telling you what to do and how to do it? If not, you may have a hard time with military life.

The military places numerous restrictions on personal behavior that would not be acceptable in civilian society. Military members are subject to military law 24 hours a day – even when off duty and off base – until the end of their term. Disobedience in the military can result in court-martial, prison, or the lifetime problem of a bad discharge.

If you can't finish your first enlistment term, you could lose all or part of the education and other benefits you were promised and be forced to pay back any “bonus” you received. Almost three out of every 10 recruits do not finish their first term (RAND Report 4258, 2020).

Furthermore, section C.9.b on page two of the enlistment agreement says your status, pay, benefits and responsibilities in the military can change without warning and REGARDLESS of any promises in your agreement! And the military has the right to keep you past your discharge date. For example, during the years 2001 through 2009, 186,000 people were kept from leaving the military when their terms were up (Armed Forces Press Service, 11/2/2009).

## WILL I LOSE SOME BASIC RIGHTS?

- If you leave your work without permission or don't show up, you can be put in jail.
- Any disobedience can result in criminal punishment.
- You can be punished without the right to see a lawyer or have a trial.
- You may be ordered to commit acts that violate your most basic values, like killing another human being.
- Your ability to spend time with your parents, partner, and other family members will be severely limited.
- You will be subject to routine urine tests for drugs.

## WILL IT HELP ME GET A JOB LATER?

Many people join the military expecting to receive valuable job training. But military training is designed for military jobs, not to help you get a civilian job later. Even in the technically oriented Air Force, many jobs require particular military skills that won't do you much good in the civilian world.

Even if you get the training for a particular military occupation that you were promised, you still might

not get experience in that job because the military does not have to use you in the field you were trained for. The enlistment agreement allows the military to assign you to whatever job they choose.

During the time some young people spend in the military, others who are the same age are spending those years in college or trade school, or getting work experience. As a result, the unemployment rate for young veterans in 2022 was 13% higher than the rate for people the same age who did not enlist (Bureau of Labor Statistics, News Release, 3/21/2023).

As former Vice President Dick Cheney once said, “The military is not a social welfare agency; it's not a jobs program.”

## WHAT ABOUT PROMISES OF BONUSES?

Enlistment “bonuses” are not really bonuses paid just for joining: they are usually paid out over time, and you could have to pay back the money if you don't complete certain requirements. Bonuses are not given to everyone, and when they are offered, the higher amounts are either given to people with special technical skills or who sign up for a longer term, or they are used to push people into very risky hard-to-fill jobs, like infantry or bomb disposal (American Military News, 1/13/22).

## IS COLLEGE MONEY FREE AND GUARANTEED?

Recruiters might promise that you'll get to go to college “free,” but it's not free – you must work for it! And the benefits will not be guaranteed.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill offers more money than in the past to those who qualify, and it allows military members to transfer unused financial aid to other family members, but there are conditions and possible problems you should know about. For example:

- People must enlist for a total of 10 years to transfer unused college benefits to family members.
- People who receive a less than fully honorable discharge lose all GI Bill benefits.
- Those who leave the military early, as one in four do, may get reduced or no benefits (RAND report, 2020).

- Veterans who wish to attend college outside the state where they live may only get a small part of their total tuition covered. In 2023, the average extra tuition cost for a non-state resident at a public four-year college was \$17,890/year, which isn't covered by the military (Trends in College Pricing, College Board, 2023).

If you need money for college, there are many other sources of aid to look at, including grants and scholarships that are TRULY free. There are federal Pell Grants, for example, and many state-funded financial aid programs (see: [https://bit.ly/college\\_financial\\_aid](https://bit.ly/college_financial_aid)). Colleges can help you find aid, and it pays to investigate the many alternatives yourself before signing away eight years of your life to the military. And if you go straight to college, instead of the military first, you can start earning the higher wages of a college graduate much sooner.

## IS THERE DISCRIMINATION IN THE MILITARY?

The military claims it treats everyone the same, regardless of skin color; but in reality, it has serious problems with inequality in the ranks. People of color are less likely to get promoted than white members of the military.

For example, in 2021, African Americans were 19% of the active-duty enlisted military, but they were only 9% of the officer ranks (2021 Department of Defense Demographic Report). Those who self-identified as either Hispanic or Latino were 17% of the active-duty military, but only 8% of the officer ranks (NBC News, November 11, 2021).

## CAN THE MILITARY GRANT ME CITIZENSHIP?

No! Citizenship is granted by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), **NOT** the military.

You can apply for citizenship more quickly while in the military, but you can also be turned down by the USCIS. And then you would still be stuck in the military and possibly be sent to war. Between 2016 and 2019, military applications were rejected twice as often as civilian applications (Task & Purpose, 8/20/2021). Even if you get citizenship, it can be revoked if you receive a less-than-honorable discharge, and then you might be deported.

Read more about citizenship and the military Here: <https://bit.ly/milcitizenship>

## Can recruiters be trusted to tell the truth?

“I learned to forget about what they told you at recruiter school. . . When I was now being asked to lie or fraud, I started to wonder to myself what else did they lie to me about?”  
– Jim Massey, former Marine Corps recruiter (“Before You Enlist” video, 2018)

## WHAT SHOULD WOMEN AND LGBTQ+ PEOPLE KNOW?

In addition to the dangers of war, women experience a special threat in the military. In a 2019 survey sponsored by the Dept. of Defense, 14.1% of heterosexual women reported having been sexually assaulted. In addition, 25.7% of LGB and 30.4% of trans military members reported having been sexually assaulted (Journal of Traumatic Stress, 6/2020).

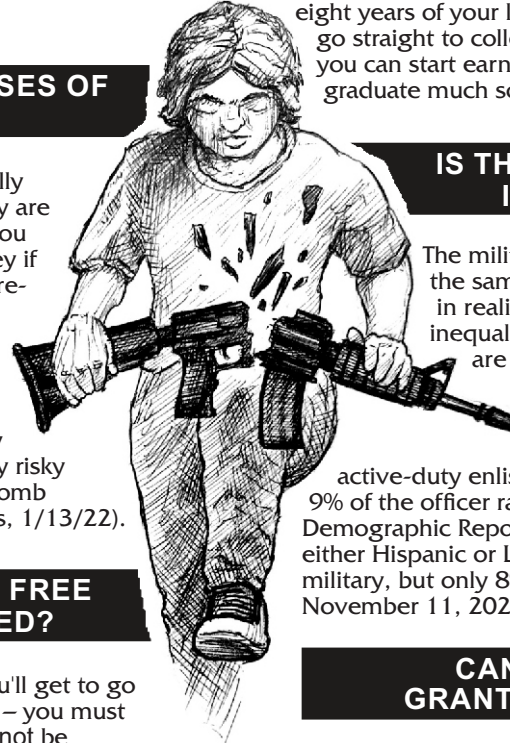
When such assaults are reported by the victims, the rate of prosecution is very low, and the victims often must continue working in a hostile workplace. These problems still exist despite many years of promises by the military to prevent them.

## WAR — YOU THINK IT WON'T HAPPEN TO YOU?

Some people have been told by recruiters that they won't be sent to war or see combat because: they are promised a non-combat job, they'll be in the National Guard or Reserves, they are going to be officers, or they are female. Some have been told that current wars will be over before they finish training. In reality, people in all of these categories have been sent to combat zones. At one point in the Iraq war, half the troops were from the Reserves or National Guard. Also, thousands of people in the Navy and Air Force were given dangerous ground duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, where the wars lasted 10-13 years.

Some recruiters claim that the risk of personal harm is small, that few people are killed or injured in U.S. wars. But in 2012, almost half of the 1.6 million military members sent to Iraq and Afghanistan had filed disability claims for injuries (Assoc. Press, 5/27/12).

The purpose of the military is to fight wars. If you are ordered to a war zone, you can't refuse to go. And if you suddenly realize that your personal beliefs are against going to war, it can be very hard to get out of the military. Before enlisting, you should talk to a vet or someone who has experienced war, and then decide if it is something you can accept.



## SERVICE AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Many good people join the military because they want to make a difference, to serve others. This is a great goal, but after joining, you may find out that it's not the kind of service you expected, and then it would be too late to change your mind.

Presidents have ordered our military to attack and occupy countries that never threatened us, like Vietnam, Grenada, Panama and Iraq. Instead of defending their country, some military members have felt they were used to defend oppressive governments or the profits of oil companies. But they had no choice unless they were willing to refuse orders and go to jail.

If service is your goal, it's important to ask yourself some hard questions: Regardless of the rank or military job you are given, would you be willing to support missions you might not believe in and actions that could cause great destruction and the loss of many innocent lives? Would you care that the U.S. military is one of the worst polluters in the world? Would you be willing to share responsibility for such things in order to get money for college or the job training that the military is offering you?

If you're not sure how to answer these questions, take some time to think about them and consider the fact that there are many different ways to serve your community, your country and the world. For example, you could become a teacher, a fire fighter, a community organizer, a social worker or an emergency medical technician – all of whom make a huge difference in many other people's lives.

## IF YOU ALREADY JOINED THE DELAYED ENTRY PROGRAM (DEP)

If you signed up for the DEP (or the Army's "Future Soldiers Training Program") and then changed your mind, watch out for recruiters who say you can't get out of it, or that you must report to boot camp to be released. Neither is true. To quit the DEP, there are simple steps you should take before your date to report for basic training. Don't expect your recruiter to help you, and you should NOT go to a military base if you are told you must report there to get released. For free help getting out of the DEP, contact the **GI Rights Hotline, (877) 447-4487, [www.girightshotline.org](http://www.girightshotline.org)**

## THINGS YOU SHOULD ASK YOURSELF BEFORE ENLISTING:

- Are you prepared to fight in any war, in any place, at any time that the government orders you to?

- Have you checked out all the college financial aid and job training and placement possibilities in your community?
- Is joining the military something you want to do, or are you being pressured into it by other people?
- Besides talking to a military recruiter, have you spoken to any of the many veterans who didn't like the military? Why didn't they make the military a career?
- If you become unhappy after you enlist, do you know how hard it could be to get out?
- If you get a less-than-honorable discharge, do you know how it can hurt your future?

## 9 THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN YOU TALK TO A RECRUITER

**1) Recruiters are not guidance counselors.** They are interested in you because if they don't meet their quota of recruits, they can be forced to work overtime or be punished other ways. One veteran recruiter told a reporter for the Albany Times Union, "I've been recruiting for years and I don't know one recruiter who wasn't dishonest about it. I did it myself."

**2) Get a copy of the military enlistment agreement (Form DD4) and read it carefully, especially page two, before you sign any papers.** Download it here: <http://www.projectyano.org/pdf/dd0004.pdf>

**3) Talk the enlistment agreement over with your parents and friends, or with a counselor from the GI Rights Hotline.** Ask about any parts of the agreement that you don't understand.

**4) Take along a parent or friend as a witness if you go see a recruiter.** Then you'll have somebody to back up your side of the story if there is a dispute over what was promised.

**5) If you have a police record or medical condition, don't hide it,** even if the recruiter tells you it doesn't matter.

**6) GET ALL PROMISES IN WRITING and have them signed by the recruitment representative!** Spoken promises are worthless; but also remember that even written ones can be changed under the contract.

**7) Get copies of everything you sign.** Keep them in a safe place.

**8) If you want a special enlistment option, be sure to ask the recruiter questions like the following:**

- For how long do I have to enlist to get this option?
- Are there any extra requirements (schooling, physical standards, security clearance, etc.) that I have to meet to qualify for this option? What happens if I don't meet them, but I've already enlisted?

- What if there is no space later in the training program or job that I signed up for?
- For options that include assignment to a particular base or area: Am I guaranteed this assignment for the entire time I'm in?

**9) REMEMBER: If you don't like your new job, they don't have to let you switch, and you can't quit!** Early discharges can be hard to get without a penalty.

## FINDING A NON-MILITARY JOB

Looking for a job can be a challenge. Some helpful advice and job search tools are available from the Web sites below.

Peaceful Career Alternatives: [www.peacefulcareers.org](http://www.peacefulcareers.org)

Career One Stop: [www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org)

Idealist.org: [www.idealist.org](http://www.idealist.org)

Teens4Hire: [www.teens4hire.org](http://www.teens4hire.org)

CareerBuilder.com: [www.careerbuilder.com](http://www.careerbuilder.com)

AmeriCorps: <https://americorps.gov/>

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Watch "Before You Enlist," a video of military veterans, including a former recruiter, sharing their stories: [www.beforeyouenlist.org](http://www.beforeyouenlist.org)

Also, contact:

**Project on Youth and Non-Military Opportunities**  
(Project YANO)

P.O. Box 230157, Encinitas, CA 92023  
(760) 634-3604; [www.projectyano.org](http://www.projectyano.org)

**War Resisters League**

30 E. 125th St., #229, New York, NY 10035  
(212) 228-0450; [www.warresisters.org](http://www.warresisters.org)

**GI Rights Hotline: [www.girightshotline.org](http://www.girightshotline.org)**  
(877) 447-4487

**Madres contra la Guerra (Puerto Rico)**

[madrescontralaguerra@gmail.com](mailto:madrescontralaguerra@gmail.com)  
<https://madrescontralaguerra.blogspot.com/>

Local contact:

To order this brochure in bulk, contact War Resisters League. Produced by Project YANO, artwork by Matt Heft.  
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## What You Should Know Before Joining the Military

## The Military's Not Just a Job . . .



## . . . It's Eight Years of Your Life!

You've probably heard the ads and the recruiter's sales pitch. Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? All advertising does. But if military life doesn't live up to the advertising, you can't bring your enlistment agreement back to the recruiter for a refund. You are obligated to the military for a total of eight years, including time in the Reserves when you could be recalled.