

Who Serves? Recruiting in the Marketplace

Jonathan SCOTT*

Abstract

In the early Fall of 2018, the U.S. Army announced an expected shortfall in recruiting the necessary men and women to meet end-strength requirements. The American economy is strong enough that military service is not as attractive and recruiting men & women in that environment is more challenging. On top of the economy, health and moral issues have disqualified a larger portion of the marketplace audience. This research examines the realities of military recruiting for servicemembers in such a marketplace, but offers, for consideration and further research, the impact of other factors historically contributing to who is recruited from the marketplace and who serves. As both popular and government observations and data concede, fitness levels, membership in traditional organizations, outdoor activity and youth engaged in part-time employment have dropped, and these indicators do not bode well for who will volunteer or be convinced to join.

Keywords: Conscription, fitness, marketplace, patriotism, recruiting, service



(Soon-to-be-soldiers taking their oath and swearing-in joining the United States military – Photo courtesy of MAJ Amanda Harrah and PFC Spencer Mullins)

Introduction

In 1973 the United States eliminated conscription and embarked upon using volunteers to populate the military. Since that time, the government, and its subordinate elements of the military services, are competitors in the marketplace (Lewis, 2009). The target audience are men & women from ages seventeen to thirty-five, who from outside appearance and limited conversation, appear to be possible candidates (other requirements must be met). The military must compete with colleges, and trades or vocational opportunities for its manpower (Woody, 2018). Enticing and convincing those candidates in the marketplace impacts, at a minimum, the defense of the nation and our national interest, perhaps the interest or security of some of our allies. The opening days

of a conflict with a near-peer competitor seem to depend much upon a number of factors that include the world situation, the salesmanship of the recruiters, the incentives to join, and of course the economy. This is recruiting which is troubled by several short-term issues, and as I argue, several long term deeper and potentially crippling factors that indicate problems ahead in answering the question, who serves?

The Recruiting Environment

The opportunities to enlist or join the military, and the possi

* Ph.D. Candidate, Faculty of Education and Humanities, International Black Sea University, Tbilisi, Georgia.

E-mail: jgs62@aol.com

SUPERVISOR: Vakhtang MAISAIA, Assoc. Prof. Dr., Caucasus International University. Deputy Director, Center for International Studies, International Black Sea University, Tbilisi, Georgia.

E-mail: vakhtang.maisaia@ciu.edu.ge; vmaisaia@ibsu.edu.ge

bility of additional monies and options increase for American men & women in economic environments like today. But the difficulties of convincing candidates to join increase (Baker, 2018). In the opposite environment of a recession or downturn, or even a reduction in the force, the opportunities are less and the additional financial incentives, or bonuses as they are known, are few or non-existent. So, goes the boom or bust of military recruiting which comes with an all-volunteer force in a western free market economy. At present, most recruiters must work hard, the budget cost of enticing one candidate is high, and the personnel managers and experts at high levels experience stress and anxiety as reports detailing the success or failure of meeting recruiting objectives – making mission- are compiled for each month.

As recognized by a senior leader within recruiting command recently, the military competes with other paths and futures for young people. The business and work community want and need them, colleges and universities as well, so for recruiters, it is a language and environment of enticing, courting, bidding for a resource (Phillips, 2018). It is a marketplace, and the American public seems content with that while the physical survival of the nation is not at stake. But while comfortable now, is it an environment that will always meet the need? (Bailey, 2007).

Meeting Requirements

American security strategy, while shifting a bit over various administrations, has generally declared the need to have the capability to fight mid-intensity conflicts in two theaters simultaneously plus appropriately protect the homeland and perform stability operations. This requires much in terms of personnel in all branches, but particularly the Army and Marine Corps. The two conflict scenario requirement has been a point of worry for around a decade (Peck, 2018). And the point of concern is manpower (in the gender neutral meaning). The potential problems with being able to fight a two-front conflict was so much of a concern that voices were heard in high places talking of preparing for a draft because the security environment and our commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan were taxing the force, but those calls and voices were drowned out by a majority fearful of where that might go.

Those who speak an alternate language and see a different environment do occasionally voice dissent (Donohue, 2011). The more recent example of this, advocating for a compulsory term of service for everyone, was, as mentioned above, revived in the darker time of the Iraq war. Several members of Congress and more often, well known people who have no re-election fears will step forward advocating a draft or some mandatory service obligation for all youth that would, in theory they believe, not only net the numbers needed for the services, but also improve the complexion of the country through a common experience of service and sacrifice. Staunch advocates of this philosophy are hard to find.

Who Is Recruited?

In considering who serves we might first ask, what is it that

America seeks in soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines? The natural inclination is to say our services seek the best, and they do, but more often than not the most accomplished and brightest go other places. The military has at times, enticed fair numbers of average young men and women.

In addition to the current challenge of a strong economy, the marketplace audience of those perhaps interested, but ineligible to join, is significant (Phillips & Harkins, 2018). Problems start with obesity and poor health, but extend into criminal records and education (Hunt & Ponnuru, 2018).

The reality in recruiting is that our military has some standards which must be met, as a base line of minimum qualifications, with some factors sliding left or right on the scale depending on numbers needed by the services (Hunt, 2018). Those numbers needed are based upon projected losses due to ETS (end of time in service), retirements, and other less predictable factors. So, there are predictable factors that influence who ultimately serves but then there are factors within the military which the recruiting or personnel managers must react to.

One factor which impacts recruiting requirements, but less frequently in our modern period to this date, are losses due to injury or death in combat. War planners in the Cold War were well versed in the expected loss factors for various types of military operations if engaged in operations against a peer or near peer adversary. In addition to war-time losses, there is the chance that following a conflict, the national command authority will decide to reduce the force because obvious requirements in periods of war, or periods of readiness, are no longer needed in peace time. This is frequently referred to as a “peace dividend” and the most notorious example of this was following the First Gulf War and subsequent implosion of the Soviet Union. Seeing the Cold War come to an end prompted leaders from all persuasions to call for reductions and a smaller Pentagon budget (Markusen, 1997).

So, predictable and less predictable factors impact on how hard or aggressively the services recruit; however, one theme has been almost a constant among military leaders since the end of conscription, and that is they like the men & women who come to them from the marketplace.

What does a marketplace recruit bring to the service? It is different than what conscripts or drafted soldiers bring? The immediate response to that questions is an obvious one. The marketplace recruit, in the initial steps, either comes willingly to the recruiting professionals seeking entry, or is contacted or approached by recruiters and solicited with information that convinces him or her to join. Regardless of whether approached, or as a “walk-in,” these applicants (presuming they become so after initial questioning and screening), must sign a contract that indicates they volunteer. In the strictest sense, they want to be there. The motivations will vary.

Obviously, there are those motivated to enter the all-volunteer force because they need employment. Tertiary motives can range from educational benefits, to a decent benefit package, to “*testing the waters*” for a possible career.

Then there are those who feel a patriotic urging to serve

and/or it was something they always or recently felt a calling to do. These men & women of course are also likely to recognize the previously mentioned tertiary reasons and/or benefits for joining and explain it as the additional benefits to doing what they desired to do. In times of national duress, or following a successful military operation, the nation sees an upsurge of walk-ins who identify patriotism or a desire to give something back as their primary reasons for joining. In the period following Pearl Harbor and the 9/11 attacks, recruiting experienced a significant surge (Lush, 2011 and Mauer, 2016). But there are other factors that create a surge in recruiting.

Pop culture and entertainment generate interest in military service or motivate possible candidates to enquire about the service. Following release of the movie *Top Gun* the services experienced a peak in volunteers (Sirota, 2011). The reality is that our entertainment industry helps shape perceptions, and the perception of the exciting and successful life of a jet fighter pilot sold many tickets (and still today earns much in royalties for online sales and rentals). Our imaginations lead us to covet the excitement.

Worrisome Trends

While the recruiters and personnel experts are wringing their hands attempting to figure out how to woo the limited candidates in today's marketplace, there are deeper and greater concerns which trouble strategic thinkers. Are there changes in American society that negatively influence producing men and women inclined to be both willing and able to serve? Unfortunately, some disturbing trends suggest that the azimuth we are taking will decrease the numbers of willing and able that enter the marketplace.

In the imaginative minds of American boys and some girls thirty to forty years ago, playing military was a common thing. Going to a vacant lot or plot of woods after watching movies such as *Battle of The Bulge* or *Midway* influenced our selection of the stick most closely resembling a rifle. A climb worthy tree might become an anti-aircraft battery. The encouragement of that martial spirit was part of the outdoor and active lives we led. Sadly, several of the changes in American lifestyles and society do not seem to bode well for promoting what we traditionally associate with characteristics of or preparation for the military (or anything very demanding), and these go beyond just beyond minimum fitness acceptance levels.

Children and young people in the United States (and elsewhere in the West) are increasingly less active outside with decreasing exposure to fields, parks, streams, and less exposure to variations in temperature that their parents and grandparents experienced (Gray, 2013 and Physical Activity Council, 2018). Play is less imaginative with less scrapes and bruises, and less sweat. This lack of exposure to challenges in terrain, weather, bugs and falls may seem innocuous, but the changes extend into teenage years in other areas.

Our youth are less physically fit and increasingly obese (Haltiwanger & Levy, 2018). Often those who need the challenge the military can offer them and have a genuine desire

to be in uniform cannot pass the most basic of physical exams, and then if passing, often present long-term challenges for the service through inability to pass the fitness requirements (depending on the service) and become long term medical or injury liabilities that are expensive and time consuming (Gurley, 2015).

In addition to young people who are strangers to outdoor play and exertion, there are growing trends of less part-time or summer jobs and less responsibility (Chee, 2013). There are not so many youths mowing grass, working in hay fields, or tending ice cream & soda fountains. We may be sending less candidates to the marketplace with work skills. We also appear to be sending those who have seldom been part of anything bigger than themselves – less participants in service or developmental organizations.

Historical youth organizations which once were renowned for outdoor adventure, teaching of life skills, and promoting what were once thought of as healthy preparations for adulthood have declined. 4-H, Boy Scouts, and Girl Scouts were once icons of American youth, and considered by many as encouraging military service and a robust life but once healthy membership in these organizations has diminished to very low levels, and so low for Boy Scouts that membership, along with lawsuits, are pushing the organization to bankruptcy (Hamilton, 2014; Ferek, 2018; Boy Scout Membership Falls, 2015; and *Why Are Fewer Girls Joining*, 2014).

Conclusion

The American all-volunteer military is presently struggling with recruiting adequate numbers to meet strength and operational requirements. The current state of the American economy is influencing this, but also the significant number of applicants unable to meet basic requirements. Leaders and citizens interested in national security should be alarmed at disappointing trends which point to increasing difficulties meeting strength needs and an even lower quality of applicants available in the marketplace who can be recruited to serve.

References

- Bailey, B. (2007). *The Army in the Marketplace: Recruiting an All-Volunteer Force* *The Journal of American History*. 94 (1), 47-74. doi:10.2307/25094776
- Baker, L. (2018). *The Army Whiffed on its Recruiting Goals This Year – Here's What It Says*
- It Will Change in 2019. Associated Press for Business Insider. Retrieved September 5, from <https://www.businessinsider.com/ap-army-says-changes-will-help-recruiting-in-2019-2018-10>.
- Boy Scout Membership Falls Seven Percent in Decades Long Decline (2015). *The Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved October 8, 2018 from <https://www.chi>

- cagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-boy-scouts-membership-decline-20150116-story.html
- Chee, B. (2013). Today's Teens: More Materialistic, Less Willing to Work. SDSU News Retrieved September 22, 2018 from http://newscenter.sdsu.edu/sdsu_newscenter/news_story.aspx?sid=74179
- Donohue, R. (2011). The Call of Duty: The Case of Compulsory Military Duty. *Northeastern University Political Review*. Retrieved December 3, 2018 from <http://www.nupoliticalreview.com/2011/10/28/the-call-of-duty-a-case-of-compulsory-military-service/>
- Ferek, K.S. (2018). The Boy Scouts of America Considering Bankruptcy Filing Amid Sex Abuse Lawsuits. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved November 21, 2018 from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/boy-scouts-of-america-considers-bankruptcy-filing-amid-sex-abuse-lawsuits-11544649657>
- Gray, P. (2013). The Play Deficit. *Aeon*. Retrieved November 16, 2018 from <https://aeon.co/essays/children-today-are-suffering-a-severe-deficit-of-play>
- Gurley, J. (2015). Military Physical Training: It's a problem bigger than obesity, with no easy Solutions. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved October 16, 2018 from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/18/military-physical-training-its-a-problem-bigger-than-obesity-with-no-easy-solutions/>
- Haltiwanger, J. (2018). America Is So Out-of Shape and Fat, Its Putting U.S. Army Soldiers in Danger. *Newsweek*. Retrieved November 28, 2018 from <https://www.newsweek.com/america-so-out-shape-and-fat-its-putting-us-army-soldiers-danger-778840>
- Hamilton, S. (2014). Strengthening 4H by Analyzing Enrollment Data. *Journal of Extension*, 52 (3). Retrieved September 13, 2018 from <https://joe.org/joe/2014june/a7.php>
- Harkins, G. (2018). How the Military Recruits When 70% of Americans Can't Serve. *MOAA*. Retrieved September 12, 2018 from <http://www.moaa.org/Content/Publications-and-Media/News-Articles/2018-News-Articles/How-the-Military-Recruits-when-70--of-Americans-Can-t-Serve.aspx>
- Hunt, T. (2018). Not Fit to Fight: Re-thinking Military Recruitment Standards. *Stratfor/Worldview*. Retrieved October 6, 2018 from <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/not-fit-fight-rethinking-military-recruitment-standards>
- Levy, G. (2018, March). Sharp Increase in Obesity Rates Over the Last Decade, Federal Research Shows. *U.S. News & World Report*. Retrieved September 2, 2018 from <https://www.usnews.com/news/damine/articles/2018-03-26/sharp-increase-in-obesity-rates-over-last-decade-federal-data-show>
- Lewis, A. R. (2009). CONSCRIPTION, the REPUBLIC, and AMERICA'S FUTURE. *Military Review*, 89(6), 15-24. Retrieved November 6, 2018 from <http://ezproxy.lib.apsu.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=31h&AN=48955044&site=ehost-live&scope=site>
- Lush, T. (2011). 9/11 Inspired Many Young Americans To Enlist in the Military. *The Seattle Times*. Retrieved December 1, 2018 from <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/9-11-inspired-many-young-americans-to-enlist-in-military/>
- Mauer, S. (2016). The Attack on Pearl Harbor United Americans Like No Other Event In Our History. *Washington Post*. Retrieved November 23, 2018 from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/12/07/the-attack-on-pearl-harbor-united-americans-like-no-other-event-in-our-the-attack-on-pearl-harbor-united-americans-like-no-other-event-in-our-history/?noredirect=on>
- Markusen, A. (1997). How We Lost the Peace Dividend. *The American Prospect*. Retrieved October 21, 2018 from <https://prospect.org/article/how-we-lost-peace-dividend>
- Peck, M. (2018). Why Must America Prepare to Fight Two Wars Simultaneously? *The National Interest*. Retrieved September 3, 2018 from <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/why-must-america-prepare-fight-two-wars-simultaneously-33356>
- Phillips, D. (2018). As Economy Roars, Army Falls Thousands Short of Recruiting Goals *New York Times*. Retrieved December 9, 2018 from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/21/us/army-recruiting-shortage.html>
- Physical Activity Council (2018). 2018 Participation Report, Page 5. Retrieved October 19, 2018 from physicalactivity-council.com/PDFs/current.pdf
- Ponnuru, R. (2018). Too Few Good Men. *National Review*, August 2018. Retrieved August 30, 2018 from <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/too-few-good-men/>
- Sirota, D. (2011). 25 Years Later, how "Top Gun" Made America Love War. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved November 1, 2018 from https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/25-years-later-remembering-how-top-gun-changed-americas-feelings-about-war/2011/08/15/gIQUA6qJgJ_story.html
- Why Are Fewer Girls Joining the Girl Scouts? (2014). *CBS News*. Retrieved September 15, 2018 from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/girl-scouts-membership-drops-sharply/>
- Woody, C. (2018, March). The US Military is Facing a Real War for Talent – But Some Valuable Recruits May Be Scared Away. *Business Insider*. Retrieved September 4, 2018 <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-military-war-for-talent-struggle-to-attract-immigrants-2018-3/>