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MILITARY PERSONNEL

Preliminary Observations
on Recruiting and
Retention Issues within the
U.S. Armed Forces

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Highlights of [GAO-05-419T](#), a testimony to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Military Personnel, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

To meet its human capital needs, the Department of Defense (DOD) must convince several hundred thousand people to join the military each year while, at the same time, retain thousands of personnel to sustain its active duty, reserve, and National Guard forces. Since September 11, 2001, DOD has launched three major military operations requiring significant military personnel—Operation Noble Eagle, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The high pace of military operations combined with the level of casualties in Iraq and other factors, such as lengthy overseas deployments, have raised concerns about DOD's ability to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of personnel who possess the skills and experience needed.

This testimony presents GAO's preliminary findings on (1) the extent to which the active duty, reserve, and Guard components have met their overall recruiting and retention goals, (2) the degree to which the components have met their recruiting and retention goals for selected hard-to-fill critical occupations, and (3) steps the components have taken to enhance their recruiting and retention efforts. This testimony focuses on enlisted personnel. In continuing its work, GAO will assess the reliability of DOD-provided data and plans to issue a report on these issues this fall.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-419T.

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MILITARY PERSONNEL

Preliminary Observations on Recruiting and Retention Issues within the U.S. Armed Forces

What GAO Found

DOD's 10 military components generally met their overall recruitment and retention goals for each of the past 5 fiscal years (FY), but some of the components experienced difficulties in meeting their overall goals in early FY 2005. However, it should be noted that several components introduced a "stop loss" policy shortly after September 11, 2001. The "stop loss" policy requires some servicemembers to remain in the military beyond their contract separation date, which may reduce the number of personnel the components must recruit. During FY 2000-2004, each of the active components met or exceeded their overall recruiting goals. However, for January 2005, the Marine Corps missed its overall active duty recruiting goal by 84 recruits and narrowly missed its goal again for February 2005. The Army also missed its overall recruiting goal for February 2005 by almost 2,000 recruits. This is significant, given that the Army has also already called up members from the Individual Ready Reserve and moved new recruits from its delayed entry program into basic training earlier than scheduled. Four of the six reserve components mostly met their overall recruiting goals for FYs 2000 through 2004, but many experienced difficulties in early FY 2005. DOD has noted that the Army Reserve components will be particularly challenged, since fewer active Army soldiers leaving active duty are joining the reserves. In terms of retention, the active components generally met their overall retention goals for the past 5 FYs. The Army, for example, met or exceeded overall retention goals from FY 2000 through FY 2004. The Army and the Air Force, however, missed retention goals in the first quarter of FY 2005.

Overall recruitment and retention data do not provide a complete representation of military occupations that are either over- or under-staffed. For example, GAO's analysis of early FY 2005 data shows that 63 percent of the Army's active component specialties are overfilled and 32 percent are underfilled. Also, several hundred hard-to-fill occupations exist within the 10 DOD components. GAO identified 73 occupations that have been consistently designated as hard-to-fill occupations. GAO's analysis also shows that 7 of the Army's current occupations (e.g., infantry and cavalry scout) and 6 of the Air Force's current occupations (e.g., combat control and linguist) are on both their "hard-to-recruit" and "hard-to-retain" lists.

DOD's components have been taking a number of steps to enhance their recruiting and retention efforts. For example, DOD has expanded eligibility for selective reenlistment bonuses and has also begun offering reenlistment bonuses of as much as \$150,000 to special operation forces personnel with 19 or more years of experience who reenlist for an additional 6 years. The Army increased the amount of cash bonuses it offers to new recruits in hard-to-fill military occupations to as much as \$20,000. The Army also increased its maximum college scholarship from \$50,000 to \$70,000. In addition, the Army plans to add 965 recruiters in FY 2005, and the Marine Corps plans to add 425 recruiters by FY 2007.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss our preliminary observations on recruitment and retention issues within the active and reserve components.¹ To meet its human capital needs, the Department of Defense (DOD) must convince several hundred thousand people to join the military each year, the majority of whom are recent high school graduates. Last fiscal year alone, DOD had goals to recruit more than 180,000 personnel into its active duty forces and more than 120,000 personnel into its reserve components. Moreover, DOD must retain tens of thousands of personnel each year to sustain its active duty, reserve, and Guard forces. As you know, this Subcommittee and others have raised concerns about DOD's ability to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of personnel who possess required skills and experience.

My statement, which focuses only on enlisted personnel, will address our preliminary findings with respect to (1) the extent to which the active duty, reserve, and National Guard components have met their overall recruiting and retention goals; (2) the degree to which the components have met their recruiting and retention goals for selected, hard-to-fill critical occupations; and (3) steps the components have taken to enhance their recruitment and retention efforts. Mr. Chairman, we expect to complete our evaluation of the services' recruitment and retention efforts by August and issue our report this fall. Findings presented here are preliminary, and we will assess the reliability of data provided to us by DOD as we complete our evaluation. The work done in preparation for this hearing was conducted from February to March 2005 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Summary

Our preliminary examination of DOD data indicate that DOD's active and reserve components generally met their overall recruitment goals from fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2004; but, some of the components experienced difficulties in meeting their recruiting goals in early 2005.

¹DOD's reserve components include the collective forces of the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard, as well as the forces from the Army Reserve, the Naval Reserve, the Marine Corps Reserve, and the Air Force Reserve. The Coast Guard Reserve also assists DOD in meeting its commitments. However, we do not cover the Coast Guard Reserve here because it accounts for about 1 percent of the total reserve force and falls under the Department of Homeland Security rather than DOD.

However, it should be noted that the “stop loss” policy implemented by several components shortly after September 11, 2001 might have facilitated some components in meeting their overall recruiting goals for fiscal year 2002 and beyond. The “stop loss” policy requires some servicemembers to remain in the military beyond the expiration of their contracts or retirement dates, which may reduce the number of new people the components must recruit to meet their endstrength goals. In fiscal year 2004, the Army, Navy, and Air Force each exceeded their enlisted aggregate recruiting goals for active duty personnel by 1 percent, while the Marine Corps met its goal. However, the Marine Corps missed its enlisted aggregate active duty recruiting goal of 3,270 new recruits by 84 people, or 2.6 percent, for January 2005 and narrowly missed its goal again for February 2005. The Army also missed its February recruiting goal of 7,050 new active duty recruits by 1,936 people, or 27.5 percent. This is significant, given that the Army has also called members of the Individual Ready Reserve into active duty and moved thousands of recruits from its delayed entry program into basic training ahead of schedule. Regarding the reserve components, four of the six components generally met their enlisted aggregate recruiting goals for fiscal years 2000 through 2004, but like the active Army and Marine Corps, most of these components also experienced difficulties in meeting their early fiscal year 2005 recruiting goals. DOD has noted that the Army Reserve components will be particularly challenged, given that more active Army soldiers are staying in the active force, and of those leaving, fewer are joining the reserve components. Moreover, all of the active components generally met their aggregate retention goals for the past 5 fiscal years. The Army and the Air Force, however, missed some aggregate retention goals in the first quarter of 2005. For example, the Army missed its reenlistment goal for servicemembers completing their first term by 6 percent. The Air Force achieved a reenlistment rate of 50 percent compared with its goal of 75 percent for servicemembers completing their second term.

Recruitment and retention rates, when shown in the aggregate, do not provide a complete representation of military occupations that are either over- or under-staffed. Our analysis of early fiscal year 2005 data show, for example, that 63 percent of the Army’s active component occupations (i.e., specialties) are overfilled, and 32 percent are underfilled. Also, 20 percent of the Marine Corps’ active component occupations are overfilled and 15 percent are underfilled. In the Navy, 32 of its active component occupations are over-filled and 55 occupations are under-filled. Based on the data we have received to date, hundreds of hard-to-fill occupations exist within the 10 DOD components. Moreover, on the basis of our analysis to date, we

have identified 73 occupations, in 7 of the 10 components, that have been consistently designated as hard-to-fill occupations. Our analysis also shows that 7 of the Army's occupations (e.g., infantry and cavalry scout) and 6 of the Air Force's occupations (e.g., combat control and linguist) are on their "hard-to-recruit" and "hard-to-retain" lists.

DOD's components have been taking a number of steps to enhance their recruiting and retention efforts. DOD, for example, can now offer selective reenlistment bonuses to personnel who reenlist while serving in Afghanistan, Iraq, or Kuwait, whether or not they serve in a critical occupation. In addition, DOD recently began to offer reenlistment bonuses of as much as \$150,000 to special operation forces personnel with 19 or more years of experience who reenlist for an additional 6 years. Individual components have also implemented changes. The Army, for example, increased the amount of cash bonuses it offers to new recruits in hard-to-fill military occupations to as much as \$20,000. In addition, the Army increased its maximum college scholarship from \$50,000 to \$70,000, and the Army National Guard doubled the amount it will provide to repay a recruit's student loan to \$20,000. Regarding the services' nonfinancial efforts, the Army and Marine Corps are increasing their recruiting forces. The Army plans to add 965 recruiters to its current recruiter force of 5,065 recruiters in fiscal year 2005, and the Marine Corps plans to add 425 recruiters to its current recruiter force of 2,600 recruiters by fiscal year 2007. Our fall 2005 report will contain more discussion of these and other DOD efforts to enhance recruitment and retention.

Background

Since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, DOD has launched three major military operations requiring significant military personnel: Operation Noble Eagle, which covers military operations related to homeland security; Operation Enduring Freedom, which includes ongoing military operations in Afghanistan and certain other countries; and Operation Iraqi Freedom, which includes ongoing military operations in Iraq. These military operations have greatly increased the services' operations and personnel tempo of the military services, and especially those of the Army and Marine Corps, which have provided the bulk of the military personnel burden associated with operations in Iraq. Additionally, a significant number of military personnel have been killed or wounded in Iraq. Many congressional and military observers have expressed concern that the current operations tempo, combined with the level of casualties in Iraq, might lead to lower recruiting and retention rates, thereby raising questions about DOD's ability to sustain long-term force requirements. In

addition, there are growing concerns that a number of stress factors, such as back-to-back and/or lengthy overseas deployments and heavier reliance on the reserve components in the Army and Marine Corps, may significantly hinder DOD's overall ability to effectively recruit and retain forces.

According to DOD officials, recruiting is the military services' ability to bring new members into the military to carry out mission essential tasks in the near term and to begin creating a sufficient pool of entry-level personnel to develop into future mid-level and upper-level military leaders. To accomplish this task, active, reserve, and Guard components set goals for accessions, or new recruits, who will enter basic training each year. To assist in recruiting, the military services advertise on television, on radio, and in print and participate in promotional activities, such as sports car racing events. In response to some of the services missing their overall recruiting goals in the late 1990s, DOD increased its advertising, number of recruiters, and financial incentives. Our September 2003 report² assessed DOD's recruiting advertising programs, and concluded that DOD did not have clear program objectives and adequate outcome measures to evaluate the effectiveness of its advertising. We recommended, and DOD agreed, that measurable advertising objectives should be established and outcome measures should be developed to evaluate advertising programs' performance.

The term retention used by DOD refers to the military services' ability to keep personnel with the necessary skills and experience. Servicemembers have the opportunity to either leave the military or reenlist when their contracts expire. A common retention concern is that too few people with the needed skills and experience will stay in the military, thereby creating a shortage of experienced personnel, decreased military efficiency, and lower job satisfaction. Although the services have each created their own unique means of tracking retention, they all measure retention in a career path at key points that are delineated by various combinations of years of service and number of enlistments. The Army and Marine Corps set numerical retention goals; the Air Force and Navy state their retention goals in terms of percentages of those able to reenlist.

²See GAO, *Military Recruiting: DOD Needs to Establish Objectives and Measures to Better Evaluate Advertising's Effectiveness*, [GAO-03-1005](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 19, 2003).

Military Components Generally Met Overall Recruiting and Retention Goals for the Past 5 Fiscal Years (2000-2004), but Some Components Have Missed Early 2005 Goals

The military components generally met their overall recruiting and retention goals over the past 5 fiscal years. However, some are beginning to experience difficulties in meeting their overall recruiting and retention goals for fiscal year 2005.

Most Overall Recruitment Goals Were Met for Past 5 Years, but Army and Marine Corps Experienced Recruiting Shortages Early This Year

According to DOD data, the active and reserve components generally met their enlisted aggregate recruiting goals for fiscal years 2000 to 2004. However, it should be noted that the “stop loss” policy implemented by several components shortly after September 11, 2001, might have facilitated these components in meeting their overall recruiting goals for fiscal year 2002 and beyond. A “stop loss” policy requires some servicemembers to remain in the military beyond their contract separation or retirement date. Keeping servicemembers on active duty longer can reduce the number of new people the services need to recruit to maintain endstrength. For example, the Army, which has implemented some form of “stop loss” since December 4, 2001, has required several thousand servicemembers to remain on active duty beyond their contractual separation or retirement date. The recruiting data presented in table 1 show that in fiscal year 2004, the Army, Navy, and Air Force actually exceeded their goals with a 101 percent rate.

Table 1: Total Active Duty Enlisted Aggregate Recruiting Goals and Achievements for Fiscal Years 2000-2004

Fiscal year	Army			Navy			Marine Corps			Air Force		
	Goal	Actual	Percent of goal met	Goal	Actual	Percent of goal met	Goal	Actual	Percent of goal met	Goal	Actual	Percent of goal met
2000	80,000	80,113	100	55,000	55,147	100	32,417	32,440	100	34,600	35,217	102
2001	75,800	75,855	100	53,520	53,690	100	31,404	31,429	100	34,600	35,381	102
2002	79,500	79,585	100	46,150	46,155	100	32,593	32,767	101	37,283	37,967	102
2003	73,800	74,132	100	41,065	41,076	100	32,501	32,530	100	37,000	37,141	100
2004	77,000	77,586	101	39,620	39,871	101	30,608	30,618	100	34,080	34,361	101

Source: DOD.

More recently, however, the Marine Corps and Army failed to meet February 2005 overall recruiting goals. The Marine Corps missed its January goal of 3,270 new recruits by 84 people, or 2.6 percent, and narrowly missed its goal again in February. This is the first time that the Marine Corps has missed a monthly annual recruiting goal since 1995. The Army is also beginning to experience difficulties and, in February 2005, missed its goal of 7,050 new recruits by 27.5 percent, or 1,936 recruits. This is significant, given that the Army has also called members of the Individual Ready Reserve³ into active duty and moved thousands of recruits from its delayed entry program into basic training ahead of schedule.⁴ Air Force and Navy overall recruiting goals, on the other hand, do not appear to be in jeopardy at this time, as both services intend to reduce their endstrengths. Over the next year the Air Force plans to downsize by about 20,000 personnel, and the Navy is looking to trim more than 7,300 sailors.

³The Individual Ready Reserve is comprised principally of individuals who (1) have had training, (2) have served previously in an active or reserve component, and (3) have some period of their military service obligation remaining.

⁴The delayed entry program consists of individuals who have signed a contract to join the military at a future date.

Table 2 shows that four of the six DOD reserve components generally met their enlisted aggregate recruiting goals for fiscal years 2000 through 2004 but that the Army National Guard achieved only 82 percent of its recruiting objectives in fiscal years 2003 and 87 percent 2004, and that the Air National Guard achieved 94 percent of its recruiting objective in fiscal year 2004.

Table 2: Total Reserve Component Enlisted Aggregate Recruiting Goals and Achievements for Fiscal Years 2000-2004

Fiscal year	Army National Guard			Army Reserve			Navy Reserve			Percent of goal met
	Goal	Actual	Percent of goal met	Goal	Actual	Percent of goal met	Goal	Actual		
2000	54,034	61,260	113	48,461	48,596	100	18,410	14,911	81	
2001	60,252	61,956	103	34,910	35,522	102	15,250	15,344	101	
2002	60,504	63,251	105	38,251	41,385	108	15,000	15,355	102	
2003	66,000	54,202	82	40,900	41,851	102	12,000	12,772	106	
2004	56,002	48,793	87	32,275	32,710	101	10,101	11,246	111	

Fiscal year	Marine Corps Reserve			Air National Guard			Air Force Reserve			Percent of goal met
	Goal	Actual	Percent of goal met	Goal	Actual	Percent of goal met	Goal	Actual		
2000	9,341	9,465	101	10,080	10,730	106	9,624	7,740	80	
2001	8,945	9,117	102	11,808	10,258	87	8,051	8,826	110	
2002	9,835	10,090	103	9,570	10,122	106	6,080	6,926	114	
2003	8,173	8,222	101	5,712	8,471	148	7,512	7,557	101	
2004	8,087	8,248	102	8,842	8,276	94	7,997	8,904	111	

Source: DOD.

First quarter 2005 reserve and Guard recruiting data suggest that the reserve components may experience difficulties in meeting their early 2005 overall recruiting goals. The Marine Corps Reserve, which achieved 106 percent of its overall first quarter 2005 recruiting goals, is the only reserve component that has met or surpassed its goal so far this year. The Army Reserve and Army National Guard achieved 87 and 80 percent of their overall recruiting goals, respectively. The Air Force Reserve achieved 91 percent of its overall recruiting goal; the Air National Guard, 71 percent;

and the Navy Reserve, 77 percent. DOD has noted that the Army Reserve components will be particularly challenged, since more active Army soldiers are staying in the active force, and of those leaving, fewer are joining the reserve components.

Most Overall Retention Goals Met for Past 5 Years

According to DOD data, the four active components generally met their enlisted aggregate retention goals from fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2004. However, as I stated in the discussion on recruiting, it should also be noted here that the services' "stop loss" policies implemented shortly after September 11, 2001, might have facilitated the services in meeting their aggregate retention goals since fiscal year 2002. In addition, the Army generally reduced its overall retention goals from fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2003.

Table 3 shows that the Army is the only active component that met all of its retention goals for fiscal years 2000 through 2004. Table 3 also shows that, in fiscal year 2004, the Navy missed its retention goal for initial reenlistments by just less than 2 percentage points and the Air Force missed its goal for midcareer term reenlistments by 5 percentage points. In fact, the Air Force missed this goal in 4 of the past 5 fiscal years and missed its goal for career third term or subsequent reenlistments in 2000 and 2001. The Navy missed its goal for reenlistments among enlisted personnel who have served from 10 to 14 years in 2 of the past 5 fiscal years, and the Marine Corps missed its goal for second and subsequent reenlistments in fiscal year 2003 only.

Table 3: Total Active Duty Enlisted Aggregate Retention Goals and Achievements for Fiscal Years 2000-2004

Service	FY 2000			FY 2001			FY 2002			FY 2003			FY 2004		
	Goal	Actual	Percent of goal met	Goal	Actual	Percent of goal met	Goal	Actual	Percent of goal met	Goal	Actual	Percent of goal met	Goal	Actual	Percent of Goal met
Army															
Initial	20,000	21,402	107	19,750	20,000	101	19,100	19,433	102	19,821	21,838	110	23,000	24,903	108
Midcareer	23,700	24,118	102	23,350	23,727	102	22,700	23,074	102	18,422	19,509	106	20,292	21,120	104
Career	24,300	25,791	106	20,900	21,255	102	15,000	15,700	105	12,757	12,804	100	12,808	13,987	109
Navy															
Zone A	N/A	29.6%	N/A	57%	56.9%	Short	56%	58.7%	Exceed	56%	61.8%	Exceed	56%	54.1%	Short
Zone B	N/A	46.5%	N/A	69%	68.2%	Short	73%	74.5%	Exceed	73%	76.7%	Exceed	70%	70.2%	Exceed
Zone C	N/A	56.6%	N/A	89%	85.0%	Short	90%	87.4%	Short	86%	87.9%	Exceed	85%	86.9%	Exceed
Marine Corps															
First term	5,791	5,846	101	6,144	6,144	100	5,900	6,050	103	6,025	6,001	100	5,974	6,011	101
Subsequent	N/A	63.4%	N/A	N/A	5,900	N/A	5,784	7,258	125	6,172	5,815	94	5,628	7,729	137
Air Force															
First term	55%	53.1%	Short	55%	56.1%	Exceed	55%	72.1%	Exceed	55%	60.5%	Exceed	55%	63%	Exceed
Second term	75%	69.7%	Short	75%	68.9%	Short	75%	78.3%	Exceed	79%	72.9%	Short	75%	70%	Short
Career	95%	90.8%	Short	95%	90.2%	Short	95%	94.6%	Short	95%	95.2%	Exceed	95%	97%	Exceed

Source: DOD.

Notes: Various Navy and Marine Corps retention goals for fiscal years 2000 and 2001 were not available or complete (i.e., "N/A").

The Army tracks retention rates by initial term (first enlistment, regardless of length), mid-career (second or subsequent enlistment with less than 10 years of service), and career (second or subsequent enlistment with 10 or more years of service).

The Navy's most important retention categories are Zone A (up to 6 years of service), Zone B (6 years of service to under 10 years of service), and Zone C (10 years of service to under 14 years of service).

The Marine Corps tracks retention by first enlistment and second or subsequent enlistment.

The Air Force tracks retention by first term (first enlistment, regardless of length), second term (second enlistment), and career (third or subsequent enlistment).

For the first quarter of fiscal year 2005, data show that the Army missed its initial reenlistment goal for active duty enlisted personal by 6 percent and its midcareer reenlistment goal by 4 percent. The Air Force also missed two

of its reenlistment goals for active duty enlisted personnel in the first quarter of fiscal year 2005. The Air Force achieved a reenlistment rate of 50 percent for second-term reenlistments, compared with its goal of 75 percent, and a reenlistment rate of 92 percent for career reenlistments, compared with its goal of 95 percent. The Air Force also established a goal for 55 percent of all personnel eligible for a first-term reenlistment to reenlist and missed this goal by just 1 percent.

We are continuing to collect, analyze, and assess the reliability of retention data for both the active and reserve components, which we will incorporate into our final report.

Aggregate Recruitment and Retention Data Do Not Identify Over- or Under-staffing within Certain Military Occupations

Recruitment and retention rates, when shown in the aggregate, do not provide a complete representation of occupations that are either over- or under-filled. For example, our analysis of fiscal year 2005 Army data, on its 185 active component enlisted occupations, shows that 116 occupations, or 63 percent, are currently overfilled and that 60 occupations, or 32 percent, are underfilled. Also, the Marine Corps told us that, of its 255 active component enlisted occupations, 52 occupations, or 20 percent, are overfilled and that 37 occupations, or 15 percent, are underfilled. Data provided by the Navy show that 32 enlisted occupations are overfilled and 55 occupations are under filled.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, about 30 percent of the occupations for enlisted personnel experienced shortages and about 40 percent experienced overages, on average, from fiscal year 1999 through fiscal year 2004.⁵ We requested the active, reserve, and Guard components provide us with their list of hard-to-fill occupations. On the basis of data for 7 of 10 components, we identified several hundred occupations that have been consistently designated as hard-to-fill because the components had not been able to successfully recruit and retain sufficient numbers of personnel in these areas to meet current or projected needs. Of these, we identified 73 occupations as being consistently hard to fill. Table 4 shows these 73 hard-to-fill occupations, by components.

⁵Congressional Budget Office, *Budget Options* (February 2005).

Table 4: Hard-to-Fill Occupations

Component	Enlisted occupation or specialty identified as being consistently hard to recruit or retain
Active Duty Army	Infantry
	Cannon Crewmember
	Multi Launch Rocket System (MLRS) Crewmember
	Field Artillery Computer System Specialist
	Cavalry Scout
	M1 Armor Crewmember
	Abrams Tank Maintainer
	Bradley Maintainer
	Petroleum Supply Specialist
	Food Services Specialist
Army Reserve	Cryptic Linguist
	Heavy Construction Equipment Operator
	Concrete and Asphalt Equipment Operator
	Carpentry and Masonry Specialist
	Cable Systems Installer-Maintainer
	Military Police
	Psychological Operations Specialist
	Civil Affairs, General
	Light Wheel Vehicle Maintainer
	Chemical Operations Specialist
	Motor Transport Operator
	Ammunitions Specialist
	Hospital Food Specialist
	Automated Logistical Specialist
	Petroleum Supply Specialist
Shower/Laundry and Clothing Repair Specialist	
Water Treatment Specialist	
Active Duty Air Force	Aircraft Loadmaster
	Airborne Mission Specialist
	Air Traffic Control
	Combat Control
	Tactical Air Command and Control
	Aerospace Control and Warning Systems
	Intelligence
Imagery Analysis	

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Component	Enlisted occupation or specialty identified as being consistently hard to recruit or retain
	Crypto Linguist
	Signals Intelligence Analysis
	Electronic Signals Intelligence Exploitation
	Survival/Evasion/Resistance/Escape Operations
	Pararescue
	Interpreter/Translator
	Electronic Computer Switching Systems
Air Force Reserve	Aircrew Operations
	Intelligence
	Aircrew Protection
	Weather
	Manned Aerospace Maintenance
	Logistics
	Maintenance Management Systems
	Transportation
	Munitions and Weapons
	Security Forces
Active Duty Marine Corps	Counter Intelligence Specialist
Marine Corps Reserve	Intelligence
	Imagery Analysis
	Reconnaissance
	Civil Affairs Non Commissioned Officer
	Ground Communications Repairer
	Military Police
	Air Traffic Controller
	Airborne Radio Operator
	Scout Sniper
	KC-130 Crewmembers

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Component	Enlisted occupation or specialty identified as being consistently hard to recruit or retain
Active Navy	Aviation Structural Mechanic (Equipment)
	Aviation Structural Mechanic (Structural)
	Cryptologic Technician
	Data Processing Technician
	Electrician's Mate
	Fire Control Technician
	Machinist's Mate
	Mineman
	Missile Technician
	Operations Specialist

Source: GAO analysis of DOD data

Notes: The remaining components (Air National Guard, Army National Guard and Navy Reserve) did not provide us with data.

Active duty Army data from 2001-2005, Army Reserve data from 2000-2009, active duty Air Force data from 2000-2005, Air Force Reserve data is current proposed information, Marine Corps data is 2000-2005, Navy data is from GAO report 05-299.⁶

More specifically, we asked DOD to provide us with the current hard-to-fill occupations for active duty components, and we received data for the Army, Navy, and Air Force. The Marine Corps currently does not report hard-to-fill occupation information to DOD. Table 5 shows the extent to which these occupations were over- or under-filled as of November 2004.

⁶See GAO, *Financial Costs and Loss of Critical Skills Due to DOD's Homosexual Conduct Policy Cannot Be Completely Estimated*, [GAO-05-299](#) (Washington, D.C.: February 2005).

Table 5: Over- and Under-filled Hard-to-Fill Occupations As of November 2004

Hard-to-fill critical occupations by active component	Personnel authorized	Personnel assigned	Difference
Navy			
Special Warfare Diver	3288	2187	-1101
Surface Force Corpsman	614	188	-426
Nuclear Missile Technician	10536	10364	-172
P-3 Flight Engineer	354	257	-97
Sonar Technician (Submarine)	1985	1901	-84
In Flight Aviation Technician	214	145	-69
Sonar Technician (Surface)	175	111	-64
Linguist	932	872	-60
Special Operations Corpsman	101	54	-47
Aviation Warfare Operator	225	215	-10
Air Force			
Crypto Linguist	1459	1916	+457
Explosive Ordinance Disposal	1006	1074	+68
Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape (SERE)	404	408	+4
Airborne Crypto Linguist	944	499	-445
Operation Intel	2519	2293	-226
Network Intelligence Analysis	1511	1365	-146
Pararescue	362	243	-119
Imagery Analysis	1150	1071	-79
Combat Control	432	360	-72
Electrical Signals Intelligence Exploitation	734	673	-61
Army			
Infantryman	39690	41287	+1597
Cavalry Scout	7656	7889	+233
Motor Transport Operator	11830	10459	-1371
Health Care Specialist	16962	16472	-490
Fire Support Specialist	4283	3914	-369
Chemical Operation Specialist	6694	6342	-352
Special Operations Medical Sergeant	769	630	-139
Petroleum Supply Specialist	8306	8206	-100
Explosive Ordinance Disposal	984	886	-98
Food Service Specialist	9659	9588	-71

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Hard-to-fill critical occupations by active component	Personnel authorized	Personnel assigned	Difference
Marine Corps			
No data available	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: GAO analysis of DOD data

Note: N/A denotes not available.

Further analysis of the data shows that 7 of the Army's occupations (infantry, fire support specialist, cavalry scout, chemical operations specialist, motor transport operator, petroleum supply specialist, and food service specialist) and 6 of the Air Force's occupations (airborne linguist; combat control; imagery analysis; linguist; SERE [survival, evasion, resistance, escape operations]; pararescue, and explosive ordnance disposal) are on both the services' "hard to recruit" and "hard to retain" lists.

DOD's Components Are Taking Steps to Address Recruiting and Retention Challenges

DOD has made enhancements to existing programs and introduced new programs in recent years to improve its ability to recruit and retain servicemembers. These programs include increasing the eligibility for and size of enlistment and reenlistment bonuses and educational benefits, and the number of recruiters.

DOD, for example, expanded the pool of servicemembers who are eligible to receive a selective reenlistment bonus. Selective reenlistment bonuses are designed to provide an incentive for an adequate number of qualified midcareer enlisted members to reenlist in designated critical occupations where retention levels are insufficient to sustain current or projected levels necessary for a service to accomplish its mission. The statutory authority for this bonus was amended in the Fiscal Year 2004 Defense Authorization Act to allow the Secretary of Defense to waive the "critical skill" requirement for members who reenlist or extend an enlistment while serving in Afghanistan, Iraq, or Kuwait in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.⁷

In addition, in February 2005, DOD announced a new retention bonus for Special Operations Forces personnel (Army Special Forces; Navy SEALs; and Air Force pararescue, plus a few other specialties) who decide to

⁷Pub. L. No. 108-136, sec. 626

remain in the military beyond 19 years of service. The largest bonus, \$150,000, will go to senior sergeants, petty officers, and warrant officers who sign up for an additional 6 years of service. Personnel who sign up for shorter extensions will receive a smaller bonus; personnel who extend for 1 additional year, for example, will receive \$8,000.

Individual components have also implemented changes. The Army, for instance, increased the amount of cash bonuses it offers to new recruits in hard-to-fill military occupations up to \$20,000. In December 2004, the National Guard announced that it is increasing its initial enlistment bonuses from \$8,000 to \$10,000 for individuals without prior service who sign up for one of the National Guard's top-priority military occupations such as infantry, military police, and transportation. DOD officials also said the Army and the National Guard are increasing the amount of their college scholarship funds for new enlistees. The Army increased the maximum college scholarship from \$50,000 to \$70,000, while the Army National Guard doubled the amount it will provide to repay a recruit's student loan to \$20,000.

Finally, the Army and Marine Corps components are increasing their recruiting forces to meet their additional recruiting challenges. The Army plans to add 965 recruiters to its recruiter force in fiscal year 2005, for a total force of 6,030 recruiters, and the Marine Corps plans to add 425 recruiters to its recruiter force by fiscal year 2007, bringing its total recruiter force to 3,025 recruiters.

Mr. Chairman, this completes my prepared statement. I would be happy to respond to any questions that you or other members of the Subcommittee may have at this time.

Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

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