

RECRUITING “THE all-volunteer” FORCE

By 1st Sgt. Terrence Hynes
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Today, while working my way through a school assignment, an argumentative essay, I came across the topic, “Should the military be allowed to recruit in high schools?”

As a recruiter, I was a little perturbed that my university decided this topic was even debatable. Recruiting is a series of rejections and negative speculation by others, so I didn’t let it bother me long. Instead, I began to ponder a thesis statement and started developing the paper.

I began to write about the all-volunteer force that our armed services have boasted since mid-1973. At some point, though, I stopped writing and just began thinking about that term — “all-volunteer force.”

“All-volunteer force” must have been coined by someone, somewhere, who never spent a few years or even a few days in U.S. Army Recruiting Command. The term is misleading in that it implies that a literal army of good citizens wakes up every morning and stands in line at the local recruiting station in eager anticipation of the doors opening, so they can get a uniform and set about the business of defending our Constitution.

Terminology better suited to describe our military would be “all-recruited force.” Believe me, there is a huge difference. No matter the branch of service in question, I assure you that no recruiter has ever been forced to sit at his or her desk and call out numbers — “... Now serving number 43” There is, I’m afraid, a little more to it than that.



Photo by Sgt. Carl Hudson

Staff Sgt. Roger L. Whaley speaks with Phillip McDonald about the possibility of becoming an Army journalist or x-ray technician at the U.S. Army Recruiting Station in Radcliff, Ky., in September 2008. McDonald, now a specialist, is a multimedia illustrator with the 1st Special Forces Group, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

This leads me back to the original irritating question — “Should the military be allowed to recruit in high schools?” I wonder if my university would find less debate about the draft. Somehow, I doubt it!

It’s not as though recruiters are going into schools with caveman clubs and dragging students to Military Entrance Processing Stations, holding up their right hand for the oath. Most recruiters spend their time in high schools fostering long-term relationships designed to provide

students with facts and options should they chose to select a military career after graduation.

Those who join while they’re still in high school do so because they — together with their parents — see benefits in that option. Parents typically like the sense of purpose it instills and having a reason to graduate on time. They like that someone is mentoring their child and providing a moral compass outside the home.

Most students who enlist, though, will

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Where 'backbone of the Army' came from

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By Dr. Robert H. Bouilly
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No doubt about it, the 1939 movie *Gunga Din* is an entertainment classic — the *Raiders of the Lost Ark* of its time. About three British sergeants serving in India, the movie is loosely based on a poem written by Rudyard Kipling, a man who wrote a lot about men of action — especially sergeants.

You may remember other Kipling stories that later became movie favorites: *The Jungle Book*, *The Man Who Would Be King* and *Captains Courageous*. But, chances are you didn't know that Kipling is the man who coined one phrase familiar to every Soldier: "The NCO is the backbone of the Army."

Kipling first said it in 1895, in a poem called "The 'Eathen." The poem, written in a Cockney accent, contains 19 stanzas. The famous phrase about NCOs comes at the end of stanza 18:

*The 'eathen in 'is blindness bows
down to wood an' stone;
'E don't obey no orders unless they
is 'is own.*

*The 'eathen in 'is blindness must
end where 'e began,
But the backbone of the Army is the
Non-commissioned Man!*

After the poem first appeared in 1896, Americans quoted the phrase frequently because by then, as a world-renowned writer, Kipling had married an American woman and was living in the United States. After finding a niche in the American vocabulary, the expression evolved into the form we know today.

The poem is really a ballad which emphasizes that discipline and leadership are the keys to military success. The story starts with a description of the hassle endured by trainees:



Rudyard Kipling

*The cruel-tyrant-sergeants they
watch 'im 'arf a year;
But then the tale turns to discuss
how sergeants care for their men:
An 'when it comes to marchin' he see
their socks are right,
An 'when it comes to action 'e shows
'em how to fight.
'E knows their ways of thinkin' and
just what 's in their mind;
'E knows when they are takin' on an'
when they've fell be 'ind
The poem continues about leaders:
'E's just as sick as they are, 'is 'eart
is like to split,
But 'e works 'em, works 'em, works
'em till he feels 'em take the bit;
The rest is 'oldin' steady till the
watchful bugles play,
An 'e lifts 'em, lifts 'em, lifts 'em
through the charge that wins
the day!*

Beyond Kipling's great storytelling, his stories focused on people who lived by values such as courage, candor and commitment to duty. The next time you hear yourself referred to as "the backbone of the Army," give a thought to the British author with an American bride.

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do so a full two years after graduation. They will enlist after having had a go at college or the workforce. They will enlist when they want to get married and need better benefits. If passing on information to those who ask for it within the walls of a school is a negative thing, it should be considered the same way regardless if it is an employer, a college or the military who is providing that information.

Do educators at my university think so little of high school students that they presume to know what is best for every one of them? I have news for them — the military pays for plenty of college degrees! Most military students have a 3.6 or higher GPA compared to a community college that is lucky to even retain 20 percent of its first-year students.

Truth be told, most recruiters probably only enlist a small number of high school students who literally beg to join, as young people often are a bit of challenge in that their minds change frequently. I wonder if those who find it questionable that recruiters spend time in high schools know the military only expects about 20 percent of its total enlistments to come from high school recruits.

I'm quite certain schools enjoy collecting federal dollars, but do they support the brave souls who protect their right to collect that money? Perhaps that would be a better topic for an argumentative essay!

You can probably detect that it annoys me when someone, anyone, questions the value in what Soldiers do every day. It irritates me when the Soldier profession is called into question by someone who undoubtedly never served in the military.

After my head cleared, I decided this topic doesn't even really deserve a well-reasoned answer at all. A question such as this could only come from the clouded judgment of a fool — one with the freedom to ask such a silly question in the first place.

Today, I will stay in the Army because I love being among the few who dare face such ignorance in the performance of their day-to-day duties. I will stay another day and continue to lead them in our effort!

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