



Recruiting and Retention: An Overview of FY2009 and FY2010 Results for Active and Reserve Component Enlisted Personnel

Lawrence Kapp

Specialist in Military Manpower Policy

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Summary

This report provides a brief overview of the recruiting and retention results for Active and Reserve Component enlisted personnel during FY2009 and FY2010. Both years were considered very strong for recruiting and retention in the Active and Reserve Components.

Recruiting and Retention Metrics

Recruiting performance for enlisted personnel is principally measured in terms of meeting *quantity* and *quality* goals. Quantity goals are based on the projected need for new personnel each service must bring in over the course of the year to meet its congressionally authorized end-strength. There are two principal quality goals: at least 90% of new recruits be high school diploma graduates and at least 60% score above average on the Armed Forces Qualification Test. Quality goals are only for recruits without any previous military service (“non-prior service”). Retention performance for enlisted personnel is principally measured by meeting one or more *quantity* goals. For the Active Components, quantity goals are based on career phase (for example, initial term, mid-career, and career) and are stated in numerical terms. For the Reserve Components, retention is tracked via overall attrition rates which measure the ratio of people who leave in a given year. Reserve Component retention goals establish a maximum attrition rate or “ceiling” which should not be exceeded. They are stated in percentage terms and are not broken out by career phase.

Overview of FY2010 Results

All the Active Components achieved their recruit quantity goals while recruit quality generally increased over the previous year, in some cases markedly. Virtually all new recruits had high school diplomas, and nearly three-quarters scored above average on the Armed Forces Qualification Test. Retention remained strong for all the services, with the Army and Navy exceeding their goals by substantial margins. The Air Force missed its goal for first term (“Zone A”) personnel by 7%, and was slightly short of its goal for career (“Zone C”) personnel. All of the Reserve Components except the Army National Guard met or exceeded their recruit quantity goals. The National Guard shortfall was due to an intentional effort to cut back recruiting in order to lower its strength, which had gone beyond its authorized end-strength. Recruit quality continued to improve for nearly all the Reserve Components. All of the Reserve Components finished the year under their attrition ceilings, and almost all showed lower attrition (better retention) than in FY2009.

Overview of FY2009 Results

All the Active Components achieved their recruit quantity goals while increasing recruit quality. This was particularly noticeable for the Army, which saw a surge in recruit quality compared to FY2005-FY2008. The Army, Navy, and Marine Corps exceeded their retention goals by sizable margins; the Air Force met or nearly met its goals. All of the Reserve Components met or exceeded their recruit quantity goals, and most increased the level of recruit quality. The Army National Guard, which has historically had difficulty in meeting the quality benchmarks, exceeded both of them. The Army Reserve, which had not met both quality benchmarks since FY2004, likewise surpassed them. All of the Reserve Components finished the year under their attrition ceilings, often by comfortable margins.

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This report provides a brief overview of the recruiting and retention rates for Active and Reserve Component enlisted personnel during FY2009 and FY2010. Since 2001, the United States has launched major military operations which have dramatically increased the operations tempo of the military services, required the large scale mobilization of reservists, and resulted in significant battle casualties. These factors have been particularly applicable to the Army, Army Reserve, Army National Guard, Marine Corps, and Marine Corps Reserve, which have shouldered the bulk of the manpower burden associated with operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many observers have expressed concern that these factors would lead to lower recruiting and retention rates and jeopardize the vitality of today's all-volunteer military. These concerns were most notable in FY2005-FY2007, when the Army had difficulty meeting its recruit quantity goals and began accepting lower quality recruits. However, these concerns have recently been mitigated by the more favorable recruiting and retention environment brought about by comparatively high unemployment rates and the improved security situation in Iraq, coupled with reduced recruiting goals for the Army and Marine Corps now that both of those services have completed major expansions.

Recruiting

Recruiting has been called the life blood of the military. Without a robust ability to bring new members into the military, the services would lack sufficient manpower to carry out mission essential tasks in the near term and would lack a sufficient pool of entry-level personnel to develop into the mid-level and upper-level leaders of the future. To protect against this, the Active and Reserve Components set goals for new recruit "accessions"¹ each fiscal year. Officer and enlisted goals are set separately. There are both "quantity"² and "quality"³ goals for the enlisted force.

Active Components

The recruiting data presented in **Table 1** below show that all of the Active Components met their enlisted accession *quantity* goals in both FY2009 and FY2010. The recruiting data presented in **Table 2** show the performance of the Active Components with respect to the Department of

¹ In the case of the Active Component, "accessions" are individuals who have actually begun their military service, as distinguished from those who have signed a contract to serve but who have not yet begun their service. Accession for Active Component personnel usually occurs when an individual is "shipped" to basic training. For the Reserve Components, the term has a broader meaning: accession can occur shortly after an individual signs a contract, when he or she is "shipped" to basic training, or when a servicemember transfers from an Active Component to a Reserve Component.

² This "quantity" goal is normally based primarily on the difference between the congressionally authorized end strength of the Component for a given fiscal year and the projected number of currently serving personnel that Component will retain through the end of the year. Officer and enlisted accession goals are set separately. To simplify somewhat, if a Component has an authorized end strength of 200,000 enlisted personnel in a given year, and it projects that it will retain 175,000 of its current enlisted members through the year, it will set a goal of bringing in approximately 25,000 new enlisted recruits for that year (actually, the goal will be slightly higher to account for those new recruits who are discharged early, usually while in initial entry training). The actual number of new enlisted recruits a Component needs, however, may change during the year as new projections are made about the retention of currently serving enlisted personnel or if the Component must increase or decrease the total size of its force.

³ DOD measures enlisted recruit "quality" based on two criteria: graduation from high school and score on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT). Since FY1993, DOD's benchmarks for recruit quality stipulate that at least 90% of new recruits must be high school diploma graduates and at least 60% must score above average on the AFQT.

Defense (DOD) enlisted accession *quality* benchmarks for those same years. The two principal DOD quality benchmarks are the percentage of non-prior service enlistees who are high school diploma graduates (HSDG) and the percentage who score above average on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT Categories I-III).⁴

In the three years immediately following the terrorist attacks of 2001—which saw a dramatic increase in the utilization of U.S. military forces—all of the services achieved their quantity goals while increasing their quality levels. In fact, recruit quality for all the services in the FY2003-FY2004 time frame reached levels not seen since the low accession goals of the post-Cold War drawdown (early to mid-1990s) allowed the services to be highly selective in who they allowed to join. This was followed by the very challenging recruiting environment of FY2005-FY2007, when a variety of factors forced some of the services to accept a lower level of recruit quality in order to meet their quantity goals. This decline in quality was most notable with respect to the Army. As the Army's recruiting difficulties have been the primary source of concern in recent years, a specific discussion of its recruiting challenges and performance is provided below, followed by a brief summary of the other services' results.

Army

In FY2004, the Army slightly exceeded its quantity goal of 77,000. Of these individuals, 92% had high school diplomas (above the DOD benchmark of 90%) and 72% scored above average on the Armed Forces Qualification Test or AFQT (well above the DOD benchmark of 60%). Only 0.5% of Army recruits had AFQT scores in Category IV (the 10th through 30th percentile). The HSDG figure was about the same as the Army had experienced for the preceding seven years, while the AFQT figure was about the same as that of the preceding year, but higher than the Army had experienced in the ten years prior to that (FY1993-2002). However, for a number of reasons—including the challenge of recruiting during wartime, competition from civilian employers during an economic boom, and an effort to expand the size of the Army which necessitated bringing in more recruits—the Army struggled to meet its recruiting goals from FY2005-FY2007. In FY2005, it failed to meet its quantity goal by 8% and the quality of its recruits fell. While achieving its quantity goals in FY2006 and FY2007, Army recruit quality continued to slide. By the end of FY2007, the Army reported that only 79% of its recruits were high school diploma graduates and 61% had scored above average on the AFQT, levels not seen since the 1980s. Additionally, the proportion of Category IV recruits rose from less than 1% in FY2003-FY2004 to about 4% in FY2005-FY2007.⁵ This decline in recruit quality occurred at a time when the Army applied extraordinary resources to its recruiting efforts: it added over 2,500 recruiters to the existing recruiting force, increased its advertising budget, raised the maximum age for enlistees from 35 to 42⁶, relaxed some existing standards (such as the prohibition on tattoos on

⁴ Other metrics that are used less frequently include the percentage of non-prior service enlistees who score well below average on the AFQT (Category IV) and the number and types of enlistment waivers granted to enlistees. However, these measures are secondary to HSDG and above average AFQT and, in the case of waivers, there is no official benchmark.

⁵ DOD regulations require that no more than 4% of an annual enlistment cohort may be Category IV (10th-30th percentile on the AFQT). In addition, no one in Category V (1st-9th percentile on the AFQT) may be admitted. DOD Instruction 1145.01, *Qualitative Distribution of Military Manpower*, September 20, 2005, paragraph 4.1, <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/114501p.pdf>.

⁶ P.L. 109-163, section 543, increased the maximum allowable age for enlistment from 35 to 42.

the neck and hands), increased enlistment bonuses from \$20,000 to \$40,000,⁷ and increased the number of medical and conduct⁸ waivers being granted.⁹

Table 1. Accession Data (Quantity) for Active Component Enlisted Personnel, FY2009 and FY2010

Service	FY2009 (Goal)	FY2009 (Achieved)	FY2009 (Percent of Goal)	FY2010 (Goal)	FY2010 (Achieved)	FY2010 (Percent of Goal)
Army	65,000	70,045	107.8%	74,500	74,577	100.1%
Navy	35,500	35,527	100.1%	34,140	34,180	100.1%
Marine Corps	31,400	31,413	100.0%	28,000	28,041	100.1%
Air Force	31,980	31,983	100.0%	28,360	28,493	100.5%

Source: Department of Defense. Past recruit quantity data available at <http://www.dod.mil/prhome/docs/numgoals04.pdf>.

Table 2. Accession Data (Quality) for Non-Prior Service Active Component Enlisted Personnel, FY2009 and FY2010

Service	DOD Quality Benchmarks		FY2009 (Achieved)		FY2010 (Achieved)	
	HSDG	AFQT CAT I-III A	HSDG	AFQT CAT I-III A	HSDG	AFQT CAT I-III A
Army	90%	60%	95%	66%	100%	64%
Navy	90%	60%	95%	78%	98%	83%
Marine Corps	90%	60%	99%	71%	100%	72%
Air Force	90%	60%	99%	81%	99%	90%

Source: Department of Defense. Past recruit quality data available at <http://www.defenselink.mil/prhome/docs/Quality%20by%20FY%20from%201973.pdf>.

Notes: HSDG: High School Diploma Graduate
AFQT: Armed Forces Qualification Test
CAT I-III A: Categories I-III A (above average scores)

⁷ P.L. 109-163, Section 635.

⁸ Conduct waivers are used for a wide range of pre-enlistment misconduct. Until 2008, conduct waivers included drug use, traffic violations, misdemeanors, and felonies, although each of the services had different rules for categorizing specific types of misconduct and different criteria for granting conduct waivers. DOD established an enlistment waiver policy effective at the start of FY2009 which revised the waiver categories, standardized the definitions of the various types of misconduct across the services, made drug use its own waiver category, and set minimum standards for requiring drug and conduct waivers. See Directive Type Memorandum (DTM) 08-018 – Enlistment Waivers, June 27, 2008, available at <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/DTM-08-018.pdf>.

⁹ The following are the number and the percentage of Army non-prior service accessions enlisted accessions with a waiver of any type in the cited fiscal year: FY2003 (8,836/12.7%); FY2004 (8,918/12.3%); FY2005 (10,185/ 15.7%); FY2006 (13,518/19.5%); FY2007 (14,820/22.0%); FY2008 (14,929/21.5%). The percentage of non-prior service enlisted accessions with waivers was relatively stable for the other three services during this period. For FY2009, the figures for the Army are 9,938 and 15.6%, respectively, but these figures cannot be compared directly to those of previous years due to a change in the methodology for counting waivers (see discussion in footnote 8)

The Army began to reverse this quality decline in FY2008, when it met its accession quantity goal while also increasing the proportion who were high school diploma graduates to 83% and slightly increasing the proportion who scored above average on the AFQT to 62%. Additionally, the Army let in fewer Category IV recruits (3.5%) and was able to reduce the number of individuals who were enlisted with waivers for conduct by about 10%.¹⁰

Improvements in Army recruit quality accelerated markedly in FY2009 and FY2010. Aided by a more favorable recruiting environment—generated by comparatively high unemployment rates and an improved security situation in Iraq—and needing fewer recruits due to the completion of the major force expansion which occurred during FY2004-FY2008, the Army was able to be much more selective. As a result, the Army was able to exceed its quantity goal in FY2009 by 8% while recruit quality shot up dramatically: 95% of new accessions were high school diploma graduates, 66% scored above average on the AFQT, and just 1.5% were Category IV. In FY2010, 100% of the Army's recruits were high school diploma graduates, 64% scored above average on the AFQT, and less than 1% were Category IV.

Marine Corps

While the Marine Corps experienced some of the same recruiting stresses as the Army in the FY2005-FY2007 timeframe—heavy involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan coupled with a major force expansion that required a greater number of new recruits—the impact was not as great. In FY2004, 97% of Marine Corps recruits were high school diploma graduates and 69% scored above average on the AFQT. These figures dropped slightly to 95% and 65%, respectively, by FY2007 but were still well above the DOD benchmarks and not substantially different from the quality levels achieved by the Marine Corps since the mid-1990s. The Marine Corps did, however, increase the proportion of Category IV recruits to 3% in FY2007, the highest level it had accepted since 1985, and it did accept more individuals with records of serious misconduct (although its overall ratio of waived individuals remained relatively stable). Marine Corps recruiting in FY2008 showed some small improvements in quality, while FY2009 saw much larger improvements. In FY2009, 99% of Marine Corps recruits were high school diploma graduates and 71% of them scored above average on the AFQT. In FY2010, 100% were high school diploma graduates, 72% scored above average on the AFQT, and less than 1% were Category IV.

Navy and Air Force

The Navy and the Air Force were the least affected by the recruiting stresses of the FY2005-FY2007 time frame. While deeply involved in the ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, their role in these conflicts resulted in far fewer casualties than experienced by the Army and Marine Corps. Additionally, both of these services were undergoing force reductions during this time frame, in contrast to the force expansions of the Army and Marine Corps. As such, they experienced less pressure to trade off quality to achieve quantity goals, enabling both services to meet their quantity goals while suffering little change in their quality metrics. The Navy's HSDG

¹⁰ While the FY2008 conduct waiver figures were still above the levels for FY2006 – and well above the levels for FY2003-FY2005 – the downward movement from FY2007 was noteworthy. Of particular significance, in FY2008 the Army reduced the number of waivers for felony convictions from 511 to 372, and in March 2009 it suspended issuing waivers for felony convictions (Ann Scott Tyson, “Army More Selective As Economy Lags,” *Washington Post*, April 19, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/18/AR2009041801992.html>).

rate declined from 96% in FY2004 to 93% in FY2007, but its above-average AFQT rate improved from 70% to 73%. The Air Force's HSDG metric remained at 99% between FY2004 and FY2007, while its AFQT metric dropped from 82% to 79%. Neither service allowed in any Category IV personnel during this period. The Navy and the Air Force both met their accession quantity goals during the FY2008-FY2010 time frame, and both experienced some improvements in recruit quality. The Navy's HSDG rate rose from 93% in FY2007 to 98% in FY2010, while its above-average AFQT rate rose from 73% to 83%. The Air Force's HSDG rate dropped one percentage point in FY2008, but returned to 99% in FY2009 and FY2010; its above-average AFQT rate rose from 79% in FY2007 to 90% in FY2010.

Reserve Components

The recruiting data presented in **Table 3** show the performance of the Reserve Components with respect to their enlisted accession *quantity* goals in FY2009 and FY2010. The recruiting data presented in **Table 4** show the performance of the Reserve Components with respect to the Department of Defense (DOD) enlisted accession *quality* benchmarks for those same years.¹¹

The recruiting trends for the Reserve Components were similar to those of their Active Component counterparts in some respects, although the indicators of recruiting difficulties appeared a bit earlier (FY2003) than for the Active Components and began rebounding earlier as well (FY2006). The Reserve Components of the Army—the Army Reserve and the Army National Guard—experienced the most significant recruiting problems particularly with respect to meeting their quantity goals from FY2003 to FY2005. The Marine Corps Reserves met their quantity goals in those years while seeing a slight decline in one of the quality metrics. The Air Force Reserves and Air National Guard briefly experienced some recruiting difficulties as well.

Army National Guard and Army Reserve

Recruiting difficulties for the Army National Guard began in FY2003, when it fell short of its recruit quantity goal of 62,000 by 13%; it also missed its FY2004 recruit quantity goal of 56,002 by 13%. In FY2005, both the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve missed their quantity goals by 20% and 16%, respectively. Largely as a result of these shortfalls, both the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve were well below their congressionally authorized end-strength at the end of FY2005.¹² There were also declines in recruit quality during this period. The Army National Guard's HSDG rate decline from 86% in FY2002 to 83% in FY2005, while its AFQT metric dropped from 60% to 57%. During this same period, the HSDG rate for the Army Reserve dropped from 94% to 88% and its above-average AFQT rate declined from 69% to 67%.

¹¹ See the section entitled "Active Components" earlier in this report for a description of the DOD quality benchmarks.

¹² The term "end-strength" refers to the authorized strength of a specified branch of the military at the end of a given fiscal year. (The term authorized strength means "the largest number of members authorized to be in an armed force, a component, a branch, a grade, or any other category of the armed forces"). As of September 2005, the actual personnel strength of the Army National Guard was 333,177—about 95% of its authorized end-strength of 350,000. The actual strength of the Army Reserve was 189,005 in September, 2005—about 92% of its authorized end-strength of 205,000. While end-strengths for the reserve components are maximum strength levels, not minimum strength levels, the inability to maintain a force at the authorized end-strength level can be an indicator of strength management problems.

Recruiting for the Army National Guard began improving in FY2006. From FY2006-FY2009, the Army National Guard met, or came close to meeting, robust recruit quantity goals. This allowed it to slightly exceed its authorized end-strength by FY2007, and to significantly exceed its authorized end-strength in FY2008 and FY2009. For FY2010, recruiting and retention were strong enough in the Army Guard that it cut back on its recruiting in the last two months of the year in order to keep from exceeding its authorized end-strength by too great a margin.¹³ Recruit quality also improved during this time frame, with the HSDG metric rising from 83% in FY2005 to 95% in FY2010. Its proportion of recruits with above average AFQT scores remained just under the DOD benchmark of 60% in FY2006-FY2008, but jumped dramatically to 76% in FY2009, and then dropped to 68% in FY2010.

The Army Reserve also improved its recruiting from the perspective of quantity from FY2006-FY2010, meeting or nearly meeting all of its quantity goals in these years. This allowed the Army Reserve to stabilize its strength at around 190,000 personnel in FY2006 and 2007 (about 7% below its authorized end-strength), and to begin increasing its personnel strength in FY2008. In FY2009, the Army Reserve was finally able to meet its authorized end-strength after four years of operating under-strength, and it maintained this during FY2010.¹⁴ However, the quality of Army Reserve recruits declined from FY2006-FY2008. During these years, the HSDG metric remained close to the FY2005 level of 88%, while the percentage of recruits scoring above-average on the AFQT declined from 67% in FY2005 to 58% in FY2008. FY2009 and 2010 showed a dramatic improvement in recruit quality. The percentage of recruits with a high school diploma shot up to 97% in FY2009 and reached 100% in FY2010. The percentage scoring above average on the AFQT increased to 63% in FY2009 and continued upward to 71% in FY2010.

Other Reserve Components

The remaining Reserve Components appear to have been much less affected by the recruiting stresses of the FY2003-FY2005 period; they likewise saw less of a rebound in the FY2006-FY2010 period. The Marine Corps Reserve and Air Force Reserve met their quantity goals in every year from FY2003-2010. The Air National Guard missed its quantity goals by an average of about 7% from FY2004-FY2007, but nonetheless maintained a fairly stable strength level consistent with its authorized end-strength. The Navy Reserve missed its quantity goals in FY2005 and FY2006, but the significance of this shortfall should be assessed in light of the reductions in the size of the Navy Reserve related to restructuring initiatives.¹⁵

¹³ The end-strength figures for the Army National Guard are as follows: FY2006 (350,000 authorized, 346,288 actual); FY2007 (350,000 authorized, 352,707 actual); FY2008 (351,300 authorized, 360,351 actual); FY2009 (352,600 authorized, 358,391 actual), and FY2010 (358,200 authorized, 362,015 actual).

¹⁴ The end-strength figures for the Army Reserve are as follows: FY2006 (205,000 authorized, 189,975 actual); FY2007 (200,000 authorized, 189,882 actual); FY2008 (205,000 authorized, 197,024 actual); FY2009 (205,000 authorized, actual strength 205,297); FY2010 (205,000 authorized, actual strength 205,281).

¹⁵ The authorized end-strength for the Navy Reserve has declined by about 21,000 from 2003 through 2010, dropping from 88,156 at the end of FY2003 to 65,006 at the end of FY2010, with the largest declines occurring in FY2004-2006. According to testimony by Navy leaders before Congress, this was largely the result of force realignments related to greater integration of the Navy and the Navy Reserve. However, this testimony also indicated that the Navy Reserve had recruiting difficulties in some of these years related to a lower flow of recruits from the Navy due to high retention among active duty sailors, competition from the Army and Marine Corps, and low civilian unemployment. See testimony of Vice Admiral John G. Cotton, Chief of Navy Reserve, before the Senate Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee on March 31, 2004; April 13, 2005; and March 30, 2006. See also testimony of Vice Admiral Dirk J. Debbink, Chief of Navy Reserve, before the Senate Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee on March 3, 2009.

Recruit quality has exhibited a positive trend in recent years. In FY2003, two Reserve Components failed to meet one or both of its quality goals. That dropped to one Reserve Component in FY2004, rose to three in FY2005 and FY2006, and dropped back to two in FY2007 and 2008. For FY2009 and FY2010, every Reserve Component met both its quality goals, in many cases by substantial margins.¹⁶

Table 3. Accession Data (Quantity) for Reserve Component Enlisted Personnel, FY2009 and FY2010

Reserve Component	FY2009 (Goal)	FY2009 (Achieved)	FY2009 (Percent of Goal)	FY2010 (Goal)	FY2010 (Achieved)	FY2010 (Percent of Goal)
Army National Guard	56,000	56,071	100.1%	60,000	57,204	95.3%
Army Reserve	34,598	36,189	104.6%	26,000	26,810	103.5%
Navy Reserve	7,743	7,793	100.7%	6,654	6,669	100.2%
Marine Corps Reserve	7,194	8,805	122.4%	8,043	10,077	125.3%
Air National Guard	9,500	10,075	106.1%	6,430	6,983	108.6%
Air Force Reserve	7,863	8,604	109.4%	9,135	9,604	105.1%

Source: Department of Defense.

Table 4. Accession Data (Quality) for Non-Prior Service Reserve Component Enlisted Personnel, FY2009 and FY2010

Reserve Component	DOD Quality Benchmarks		FY2009 (Achieved)		FY2010 (Achieved)	
	HSDG	AFQT CAT I-III A	HSDG	AFQT CAT I-III A	HSDG	AFQT CAT I-III A
Army National Guard	90%	60%	94%	76%	95%	68%
Army Reserve	90%	60%	97%	63%	100%	71%
Navy Reserve	90%	60%	94%	75%	97%	79%
Marine Corps Reserve	90%	60%	98%	73%	100%	76%
Air National Guard	90%	60%	91%	77%	94%	78%
Air Force Reserve	90%	60%	99%	73%	100%	76%

Source: Department of Defense.

¹⁶ The components failing to meet one or both quality metrics are as follows: the Army National Guard and the Navy Reserve in FY2003; the Army National Guard in FY2004; the Army National Guard, the Army Reserve, and the Air Force Reserve in FY2005; the Army National Guard, the Army Reserve, and the Navy Reserve in FY2006; the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve in FY2007 and FY2008.

Analysis

Concerns about the health of military recruiting efforts were substantial in the FY2005-FY2007 timeframe, but these concerns have been mitigated by the more favorable results experienced in FY2008-2010. FY2009 and FY2010 were remarkably strong recruiting years for all the services and their Reserve Components, particularly with respect to the quality of new recruits for the Army, Army Reserve, and Army National Guard.

There are a number of likely causes for this recruiting success. One factor that has a powerful impact on military recruiting is the state of the economy. Military recruiting is generally easier in times of high unemployment and more difficult in times of low unemployment. Historical data indicate that the unemployment rate dropped from 2003 through 2007 (falling from 6.0% in 2003 to 4.6% for 2006 and 2007) and then climbed to 5.8% in 2008 and 9.3% in 2009. The unemployment rate was 9.6% for FY2010.¹⁷

Another factor was likely the cumulative effect of the substantial increases in military compensation that have occurred over the past decade or so. In most years between FY2001 and FY2011, Congress increased basic pay by an amount that was at least 0.5% higher than the annual increase in the employment cost index (a common measure of increases in wages for private-sector employees). Congress initiated a multi-year reform of housing allowances between FY1998-FY2005 to raise housing allowance rates in order to bring them line with actual housing costs. Congress also increased the amount of hostile fire pay and family separation allowance in 2002, authorized premium-based TRICARE coverage for non-activated reservists in 2006, and enacted a generous new educational benefit in 2008. Cumulatively, these changes have made the military compensation package much more attractive.

A third important factor was likely the improved security situation in Iraq, which resulted in a rapid decline in casualties. From 2004 to 2007, roughly 700 servicemembers were killed in action each year while serving in Iraq, with about 70% of them serving in the Army and its Reserve Components. However, as security improved in Iraq, the number of those killed in action in Iraq dropped to 221 in 2008, 74 in 2009, and 19 in 2010.¹⁸

One more factor which positively affected recruiting in FY2009 was the completion of the major multi-year efforts by the Army and the Marine Corps to increase their personnel strength. These growth initiatives required those services to set higher goals for the number of new accessions. With the successful completion of its Grow the Army initiative, the Army was able to lower its accession goal from 80,000 per year in FY2005-FY2008 to 65,000 per year in FY2009. Likewise, the Marine Corps was able to reduce its accession goal from 35,576 in FY2007 and 37,967 in FY2008 to 31,400 in FY2009. In July 2009, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced plans to temporarily increase the size of the Army by another 22,000 soldiers.¹⁹ As a result, the Army

¹⁷ Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, available at <http://www.bls.gov/>.

¹⁸ DOD casualty data for Iraq available at <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/oif-total-by-month.pdf> (for Operation Iraqi Freedom) and <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/ondmonth.pdf> (for Operation New Dawn). On the other hand, casualties in Afghanistan rose significantly from 2008 to 2010, although the numbers are still below the peak experienced in Iraq. From 2005 to 2007, about 70 servicemembers on average were killed in action each year while serving in Afghanistan; that figure rose to 132 in 2008, 271 in 2009, and 436 for 2010. DOD casualty data for Afghanistan available at <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/oefmonth.pdf>.

¹⁹ John J. Kruzell, "Gates Calls for Increase of 22,000 Soldiers," *American Forces Press Service*, July 21, 2009, <http://www.army.mil/-news/2009/07/21/24678-gates-calls-for-increase-of-22000-soldiers/>.

raised its accession goal to 74,500 for FY2010. No further increases were proposed for the Marine Corps, which accordingly was able to set its FY2010 accession goal at just 28,000—the lowest accession goal for that service in at least three decades. On January 6, 2011, Secretary Gates proposed reducing the strength of the Army and Marine Corps beginning in FY2015.²⁰ It is unclear how Congress will respond to this proposal, but it could result in lower recruiting goals in future years.

Retention

The term retention refers to the rate at which military personnel voluntarily choose to stay in the military after their original obligated term of service has ended.²¹ Imbalances in the retention rate can cause problems within the military personnel system. A common retention concern is that too few people will stay in, thereby creating a shortage of experienced leaders, decreasing military efficiency and lowering job satisfaction. The opposite concern is that too many people will stay in, thereby decreasing promotion opportunities and possibly requiring involuntarily separations in order to prevent the organization from becoming “top heavy” with middle and upper level leaders, or to comply with end-strength limitations. Each of these outcomes can have a negative impact on recruiting by making the military a less attractive career option.

Active Components

The data presented in **Table 5** show that the Army exceeded all of its retention goals for enlisted personnel in FY2009 and FY2010, and exceeded them by fairly large margins. The Army’s retention success—in these and prior years—has been particularly remarkable in light of the heavy stress placed on Army personnel over the past nine years due to ongoing combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Marine Corps has likewise borne a heavy share of the manpower burden associated with operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and it too has exhibited strong retention. It exceeded its retention goals in FY2009 and FY2010 by substantial margins.²²

²⁰ Craig Whitlock, “Pentagon to cut spending by \$78 billion, reduce troop strength,” *Washington Post*, January 6, 2011, pp. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/06/AR2011010603628.html?hpid=topnews>.

²¹ The obligated term of service for enlisted personnel is determined by their initial enlistment contract. The normal service obligation incurred is eight years, which may be served in the Active Component, in the Reserve Component, or some combination of both. For example, an individual may enlist for four years of service in the Active Component, followed by four years of service in the Reserve Component. See 10 USC 651 and DOD Instruction 1304.25.

²² It did fall about 13% short of its “first term” goal in FY2008 and about 8% short in FY2007, but this was due to exceptionally high retention goals associated with increasing the size of the Marine Corps rather than poor retention. While the Marine Corps had a “first term” retention goal of 5,892 in FY2006, it was increased to 8,298 in FY2007 and to 9,507 in FY2008. While it did not meet these sharply increased retention goals, it nonetheless achieved a much higher retention *rate* than it did in FY2006. See U.S. Congress, House Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Military Personnel, *Fiscal Year 2010 National Defense Authorization Budget Request on Military Personnel Overview*, 111th Cong., 1st sess., May 21, 2009, Statement of Lieutenant General Ronald S. Coleman, Deputy Commandant for Manpower & Reserve Affairs, http://armedservices.house.gov/pdfs/MP052109/Coleman_Testimony052109.pdf, p. 6.

Table 5. Retention Data for Active Component Enlisted Personnel, FY2009 and FY2010

Service/ Retention Category	FY2009 (Goal)	FY2009 (Achieved)	FY2009 (Percent of Goal)	FY2010 (Goal)	FY2010 (Achieved)	FY2010 (Percent of Goal)
Army^a						
Initial Term	19,250	26,524	137.8%	24,500	27,436	112.0%
Mid Career	23,100	25,871	112.0%	24,000	26,577	110.7%
Career	12,650	15,992	126.4%	11,500	14,092	122.5%
Navy^b						
Zone A	13,300	14,295	107.5%	12,600	16,930	134.4%
Zone B	9,400	10,123	107.7%	8,300	10,845	130.7%
Zone C	6,000	6,477	108.0%	5,800	7,750	133.6%
Air Force^c						
Zone A	17,296	17,518	101.3%	17,052	15,827	92.8%
Zone B	9,892	9,869	99.8%	10,030	10,715	106.8%
Zone C	8,346	8,211	98.4%	9,102	8,959	98.4%
Marine Corps^d						
First Term	7,334	8,011	109.2%	6,735	6,841	101.6%
Subsequent	7,464	7,990	107.1%	6,916	7,424	107.3%

Source: Department of Defense.

- The Army tracks retention rates in three categories: initial term (serving in first enlistment, regardless of length), mid-career (second or subsequent enlistment with less than ten years of service), and career (second or subsequent enlistment with ten or more years of service). It states its retention goals in numerical terms.
- The Navy's most important retention categories are Zone A (up to six 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 Air Force's most important retention categories are Zone A (17 months to under 6 years of service), Zone B (six years of service to under ten years of service), and Zone C (ten years of service to under fourteen years of service).
- The Marine Corps tracks retention rates in two categories: first term (serving in first enlistment) and subsequent (second or subsequent enlistment). The Marine Corps' retention goal is stated in numerical terms.

After some difficulties in FY2008,²³ the Air Force met, or nearly met, all of its reenlistment goals in FY2009. It met, or nearly met, two of three reenlistment goals in FY2010. Its results for first-term reenlistments in FY2010 were substantially below goal, but Air Force analysts point out that the Air Force was trying to reduce its force at this time in order to stay under its end-strength limits. To achieve these reductions, several thousand airmen were given incentives to separate from the Air Force. The Navy exceeded its retention goals in FY2009 by a comfortable margin, and by an even larger margin in FY2010.

Reserve Components

The Department of Defense tracks Reserve Component retention via overall attrition rates. Attrition rates measure the percentage of people who leave in a given year, rather than the number of people who stay. Reserve Component retention goals establish a maximum attrition rate or “ceiling” which should not be exceeded. They are stated in percentage terms and are not broken out by career phase. The data show all of the Reserve Components achieved enlisted attrition rates below their ceilings for FY2009 and FY2010 (see **Table 6**).

Table 6. Attrition Data for Reserve Component Enlisted Personnel FY2009 and FY2010

Reserve Component	Attrition Goal (Ceiling)	FY2009 (Achieved)	FY2010 (Achieved)
Army National Guard	19.5%	19.3%	17.3%
Army Reserve	28.6%	16.7%	16.1%
Navy Reserve	36.0%	23.8%	20.7%
Marine Corps Reserve	30.0%	24.3%	24.9%
Air National Guard	12.0%	9.3%	9.1%
Air Force Reserve	18.0%	15.8%	13.7%

Source: Department of Defense.

Analysis

Retention has been positively affected by some of the same factors which have led to strong recruiting (see “Recruiting”). Put simply, a relatively weak civilian job market coupled with an attractive military compensation package provides fewer incentives for members to leave the military. Additionally, while the force expansions of the Army and Marine Corps in the past few years have generated a greater need for manpower—and hence more challenging retention

²³ The Air Force missed all three of its FY2008 retention goals by large margins, although the magnitude of this shortfall appears to have been distorted by the implementation of new goal-setting and achievement-measuring methodologies. Specifically, the Air Force changed its goal setting methodology from one based on historical reenlistment rates to goals based on specific skill and grade needs, and narrowed the criteria for counting whether a reenlistment “counted” towards a goal. This new counting methodology reportedly failed to count thousands of actual reenlistments towards the Air Force’s goals. (Author’s discussion with Air Force enlisted analysis staff). The Air Force tripled its funding for new Selective Reenlistment Bonuses in FY2009 and refined its methodology for counting reenlistments to include some previously omitted.

goals—they have also provided more opportunities for promotion and, thus, an additional incentive to continue serving for some individuals.²⁴

Although it may seem counterintuitive, the high operational tempo and large scale reserve mobilizations that have occurred since September 11, 2001, may also have had a positive impact on retention. A number of studies indicate that deployments can enhance retention, perhaps by providing participants with a sense of accomplishment.²⁵ However, some of these studies also indicate that after a certain threshold level, this positive effect diminishes or becomes negative. Additionally, these studies focused on retention behavior during the 1990s, when deployments were generally shorter and less hostile than during the last nine years. A recent RAND report looks at more current data, contrasting the relationship between deployment and retention during the periods 1996-2001 versus 2002-2007. Its findings, in part, are summarized below:

Analysis of the survey data indicates that survey respondents who had a deployment involving hostile duty in the year prior to the survey experienced higher-than-usual work stress and higher-than-usual personal stress. They also reported a lower intention to stay in the military.

However, the lower intention to stay was not borne out by analysis of actual reenlistment. Using hostile deployment in the year before a reenlistment decision as an indicator, the study found that the Air Force and Navy experienced no real effect on first-term reenlistment numbers, and the same was true of the Marine Corps until 2005–2007, when the effect of deployment was positive. Deployment had a positive but decreasing effect on Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps second-term reenlistments through 2003, when the effect neared zero, but it then rebounded and was positive in 2004–2007.

The Army's trends were different, however. The effect of deployment on Army reenlistment had been positive before 2002 and during the first few years of the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, but the effect decreased after 2002 and turned negative in 2006. The pattern was similar for second-term reenlistment.... The estimate for 2006 shows that hostile deployment in the previous 12 months reduced reenlistment by eight percentage points—a large decrease....

More than any other Service, the Army increased the number of occupations eligible for a bonus as well as the dollar amount of bonuses, raising the number of reenlisting soldiers who received a bonus from 15 percent in 2003–2004 to nearly 80 percent in 2005–2007; in that same period, the average value of bonuses increased by more than 50 percent.

The Army's extended use of reenlistment bonuses helped to offset the decreasing and (by 2006) negative effect of deployments on reenlistment for both first- and second-term personnel.²⁶

²⁴ Conversely, the recently announced plan by the Secretary of Defense to reduce the size of the Army and Marine Corps will lead to lower retention goals as the drawdown is implemented. It may also lead to reduced promotion opportunity in some career fields, thereby providing a retention disincentive.

²⁵ James Hosek and Mark Totten, *Does Perstempo Hurt Reenlistment? The Effect of Long or Hostile Perstempo on Reenlistment*, RAND, 1998; Paul Sticha, Paul Hogan and Maris Diane, *Personnel Tempo: Definition, Measurement, and Effects on Retention, Readiness and Quality of Life*, Army Research Institute, 1999; Peter Francis, *OPTEMPO and Readiness*, Center for Naval Analysis, 1999; and Paul Hogan and Jared Lewis, *Voluntary Enlisted Retention and PERSTEMPO: An Empirical Analysis of Army Administrative Data*, The Lewin Group.

²⁶ James Hosek and Francisco Martorell, *How Have Deployments During the War on Terrorism Affected Reenlistment*, RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2009, p. 1 of Research Brief, http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/ (continued...)

Options for Congress

The traditional policy levers used by Congress and DOD to manage recruiting and retention include varying the number of recruiters, funding for advertising, and funding for enlistment and reenlistment bonuses. When recruiting or retention shortfalls occur, or are anticipated, Congress may elect to apply additional resources to these mechanisms. Conversely, when recruiting or retention are expected to be strong, Congress may elect to shift resources away from these areas.

The success of the services in meeting—and in many cases exceeding—their recruiting and retention goals in FY2009 led to a reconsideration of the appropriate level of funding for recruiting and retention programs. The Obama Administration's FY2010 budget request proposed an \$800 million reduction in the Defense Department's recruiting and retention budget.²⁷ The Department of Defense Appropriations Act for 2010 (P.L. 111-118) contained about \$95 million in additional cuts to enlistment bonuses, reenlistment bonuses, and advertising beyond what the Administration proposed, as well as a \$10 million reduction in training funds related to Army National Guard recruiting and retention.²⁸ The Administration's FY2011 budget continued this funding trend by requesting about \$300 million less for recruiting and retention. According to a DOD briefing document, this "reflects the Department's efforts to offer optimal incentives to achieve manning goals and anticipates continuation of a strong recruiting and retention environment."²⁹

Debate over the precise level of resources to devote to recruiting and retention could be substantial in coming years, particularly if some of the factors that contributed to the remarkable success of FY2009 and FY2010 fade. One of the main factors contributing to the strong recruiting and retention environment of the past two years—a relatively high unemployment rate—will likely continue for at least a couple more years.³⁰ However, the level of violence in Afghanistan is on the upswing, and this could make recruiting and retention more challenging if it continues, as

(...continued)

2009/RAND_RB9468.pdf. Full report available at http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG873.pdf.

²⁷ According to the Department of Defense FY2010 budget request, "While the Department continues to face some challenges to recruit and retain an All-Volunteer Force, the interest in joining and remaining in the military has risen as the Nation's economic situation has declined. The FY 2010 budget reflects an additional \$0.6 billion in baseline funding for recruiting and retention, a shift of funding previously resourced by supplemental appropriations. Overall funding for recruiting and retention declines by \$0.8 billion from FY 2009 to FY 2010. This reduction in recruiting and retention funding is possible now that the Army and Marine Corps have met their higher end strength goals two to three years ahead of schedule." Department of Defense, *FY2010 Budget Request Summary Justification*, Washington, DC, May 2009, pp. 2-12, http://comptroller.defense.gov/defbudget/fy2010/fy2010_SSJ.pdf. See also Steve Vogel, "Military Recruiting Faces a Budget Cut," *Washington Post*, May 11, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/10/AR2009051002172.html>.

²⁸ P.L. 111-118, *Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2010, Explanatory Statement*, pp. 80, 83, 86, 99, 101, 114, 121, and 132.

²⁹ Department of Defense, *FY2011 Budget Request*, February 2010, p. 19, http://comptroller.defense.gov/defbudget/fy2011/fy2011_BudgetBriefing.pdf. Note that as of the date of this report, a FY2011 Defense Appropriations Act had not been passed by Congress; the Department of Defense is operating under a continuing resolution (P.L. 111-322).

³⁰ According to the Congressional Budget Office's forecast, "The modest growth in output projected for the next few years points to sluggish growth in employment during the remainder of this year and next. Consequently, CBO projects that the unemployment rate will decline slowly, falling to 9.3 percent at the end of 2010 and 8.8 percent at the end of 2011. After that, the growth in employment will accelerate, and the unemployment rate will decline more rapidly, reaching 5.1 percent at the end of 2014." Congressional Budget Office, *The Budget and Economic Outlook: An Update*, Washington, DC, August 2010, p. xiv, <http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/117xx/doc11705/08-18-Update.pdf>.

could a resurgence of violence in Iraq. The Army's new force expansion initiative, while smaller than the one it conducted in FY2004-FY2008, will require continued strong recruiting and retention in FY2011 and 2012. Additionally, the reduced recruiting and retention budgets in FY2010 could be a factor as well, although this could be offset by the impact of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, a new educational benefit passed by the 110th Congress.³¹ The Post 9/11 GI Bill, which went into effect on August 1, 2009, generally provides a higher benefit level than the older Montgomery GI Bill. It also provides for the transferability of benefits to family members for those servicemembers who agree to serve for longer periods of time, thus acting as a retention incentive.

Author Contact Information

Lawrence Kapp
Specialist in Military Manpower Policy
lkapp@crs.loc.gov, 7-7609

³¹ For more information on this program, see CRS Report R40723, *Educational Assistance Programs Administered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*, by Cassandra Dortch.