



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.