

Joining the Military is Hazardous to Your Future

“The reason to have a military is to be prepared to fight and win wars...it’s not a jobs program.” —Former Secretary of Defense Cheney

Many people believe that joining the military is a way out of poverty. Some veterans do say that their experience in the military, or the college benefits that they were able to get, was helpful to them. But the reality for most veterans is far different. The military spends \$1.9 billion each year on recruiting, and the military’s ads project an image of opportunity in the military that does not withstand sober analysis.

The first recruiting myth is how long you will serve. The military regards you as part of the Individual Ready Reserve, and therefore subject to call-up, for eight years from the date of your arrival at basic training, even if you only signed up for two years: ask those who were deployed to the Persian Gulf long after they thought their commitment had ended!

MONEY FOR COLLEGE

The military isn’t a generous financial aid institution, and it isn’t concerned with helping you pay for school. Two-thirds of all recruits never get any college funding from the military. Only 15% graduated with a four year degree.

What about going to school while you’re in? Many GIs report that military life leaves them too busy and exhausted — and doesn’t really make time for them to go to class.

JOB SKILLS TRAINING

Veterans Earn Less than Non-Veterans

Perhaps one of the best measures of the economic impact of joining the military is the analysis of whether a person who enters the military, on average, earns more or less than a comparable non-veteran. In a comprehensive overview of 14 studies which analyzed this question, Stephen R. Barley of the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell U. found that the average post-Vietnam War-era veteran will earn between 11% (Crane and Wise 1987) and 19% (Rosen and Taubman, 1982) less than non-veterans from comparable socioeconomic backgrounds. According to a 1990 study by Bryant and Wilhite, the average veteran will earn 85 cents less per hour (about \$1700 less per year) than non-veteran peers.

Military Training is Primarily for Military Jobs

Bryant and Wilhite found that veterans averaged only 1.78 months of training in 31 months of active duty. Mangum and Ball, Ohio State researchers who received funding from the military, found that only 12% of male veterans and 6% of female veterans surveyed made any use of skills learned in the military in their civilian jobs. Barley concludes, “The evidence on rates of return to training and the probability of finding a job in one’s chosen occupation, strongly sug-



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