

Recruiters Lie

— KATHY GILBERD

When I asked military counselors, attorneys and counter-recruitment activists around the country for anecdotes about recruiter misconduct, the most common response was that it was just too hard to keep track because this happens all the time — virtually everyone says the recruiters lied.

Lies about training, assignments and benefits are routine. Many recruits are persuaded to sign “open” contracts with verbal assurance that they can request and get a specific job or Military Occupational Specialty once they are in. The request part is true, but the military has no obligation to grant a request. Other recruits get misleading and exaggerated information about the training they’ll receive and its value in the civilian job market — medics don’t really qualify as civilian nurses, for example. Often recruits rely on verbal promises and are rushed to sign enlistment agreements without reading the small print that explains the military need not honor verbal promises. But written guarantees can also be misleading. Soldiers may go through the training program they were offered, only to find that it was nothing like the recruiter’s description.

Recruiters often persuade recruits to lie by leaving out important medical, personal or legal problems that might prevent enlistment. Some recruiters aid in this process by forging high school diplomas or parental consent forms for minors, fudging on background checks, or helping recruits complete tests and paperwork.

Although military regulations make it quite easy for new recruits to get out of the military before they enter active duty, recruiters say otherwise. Recruits in the Delayed Entry Program (DEP) who want out are told that discharge is not possible, or that it will result in federal conviction and keep them from getting government jobs or benefits. Lawful permanent residents who request discharge from the DEP have been told that they will be deported unless they report for active duty.

Some recruiters have gone beyond lies by isolating and intimidating recruits at recruiting offices or at Military Entrance Processing Stations (MEPS). In some cases, high-pressure tactics are expanded to include parents, particularly those who speak little English or who appear vulnerable to recruiters’ threats. In one recent case, a recruiter actually called the police to a recruit’s home to force him to go with the recruiter to MEPS; fortunately, the police officers responded by ordering the recruiter to leave.

Recruiters must meet quotas. Those who fail to do so face transfer to much less desirable duties, like combat, as well as poor performance evaluations, which can affect promotion and careers. While recruiter fraud and misconduct have been around for years, the recruitment problems of the war in Iraq have resulted in more lies as well as more complaints about recruiter misconduct. ■

One of my favorite examples was the caller who was told by the recruiter that if you don’t like the Army after you’ve been in basic training for about two weeks, you just talk to your drill sergeant and a discharge can be arranged. The caller, who seemed intelligent enough, said he did that. The drill sergeant responded, “I own your ass — get out of my face!”

— JIM PICTON, GI RIGHTS COUNSELOR, WAR RESISTERS LEAGUE

A young man in the Delayed Entry Program (DEP) changed his mind about enlisting. The recruiter said to him that Sept. 11 changed everything — “If you don’t report, that’s treason and you will be shot.” I helped him to obtain a discharge.

Another young man in the Navy DEP in upstate New York also changed his mind and wanted to get out. The recruiter told him, “I understand that. You need to come with me; we’re going to go down to the office and fill out some paperwork to get you out.” This recruiter drove him to a military entrance processing station a couple of hours away, then put him up in a hotel and told him, “Tomorrow morning you’re off to boot camp.” The young man was stranded there without any money or means to get home. This happened again with someone in the DEP in Virginia, who was driven to a processing station in Baltimore and left stranded. He was able to get home before processing, and was later discharged from the DEP.

— BILL GALVIN, COUNSELING COORDINATOR, CENTER ON CONSCIENCE AND WAR

We were once contacted by a high school student who was trying to get the Marines to let him out of the Delayed Entry Program. At one point, two Marine recruiters went to his workplace and verbally harassed him. The Marines only left after his boss threatened to physically remove them. He was eventually released from the DEP, but not until after his school principal threatened to ban all Marine recruiters from the campus — a tactic that, unfortunately, can no longer be used because of a new federal law mandating recruiter access to schools.”

— RICK JAHNKOW, COMD

A soldier in South Carolina asked to be discharged from the Delayed Entry Program and was instead sent to basic training. His recruiter told him that he needed to go to Ft. Jackson (an Army training base) for out-processing procedures on the discharge. According to his family, he was threatened with AWOL charges, a \$50,000 fine, and possible prison time if he did not sign the paperwork to go on active duty. Fortunately, the soldier was discharged after he and his family raised complaints.

— SOURCE: ASSOCIATED PRESS, JUNE 20, 2004

A recruiter came to the home of a Spanish-speaking mother who was opposed to her son joining the military and had her sign a paper by saying that it was just for permission to get a medical workup. It turned out that she signed a consent form for her minor son’s enlistment.

— LYNN GONZALEZ, GI RIGHTS COUNSELOR,
SAN DIEGO MILITARY COUNSELING PROJECT

Jimmy Massey, a former Marine Corps recruiter, said, “The Marine Corps can guarantee you a job all day long, but that doesn’t mean you’re going to actually get it.” He explained that recruiters worked with the sheriff’s department, police department and schools. “Maybe Johnny Smith had some problems with the law. That’s when I’d go to the DA and ask if Johnny was salvageable. If he was, I’d tell the DA, ‘Well, I talked with Johnny and he’s thinking of going into the Marine Corps.’” Massey said that serious medical conditions, such as asthma, were ignored. “I’d ask an applicant concerned about his asthma if he uses an inhaler. If he answered yes, I’d tell him that if he controlled it with an inhaler then he didn’t really have it. Then I’d tell him to give me 10 pushups. If he did that with no trouble, I’d say, ‘See, you don’t have asthma!’”

— SOURCE: VETERANS FOR PEACE NEWSLETTER, FALL 2004

SIGNED UP FOR THE MILITARY?

If You Change Your Mind, You May Not Have to Go

Getting out of the Delayed Entry Program is easy.

What is the Delayed Entry Program?

Most people who enlist are signed up into the Delayed Entry Program (DEP), which is also called the Delayed Enlistment Program, for up to a year before they report for active duty training. Sign now, pay later. It's a popular way to sell cars, stereos and military enlistment. The DEP is particularly attractive to high school seniors who are unsure about what to do after graduation. A lot can happen in a year (especially for teenagers!), and many young people change their minds about what they want to do with their lives.

How does someone get out of the Delayed Entry Program?

While DEP recruits have incurred a legal obligation to the military, getting out of the DEP is simple: write a letter requesting separation that fully explains why the recruit is unable or unwilling to serve. If there is more than one reason, explain them all. Don't say anything to the recruiter until after this letter is written and sent.

What kinds of reasons are acceptable?

While the military defines specific separation categories, as long as the recruit states clearly that he or she is no longer interested in serving in the military, almost any reason is acceptable. Despite occasional threats of involuntary activation from recruiters, the military currently releases all DEP recruits who request a separation.

The military's list of discharge categories includes: conscientious objection (a belief that it is wrong to take part in war); pursuit of higher education or vocational training; civilian job opportunity; erroneous enlistment or recruiting error; failure to graduate high school; family issues (marriage, children, hardship or dependency); homosexual conduct; medical or psychological disqualifications; personal problems; failure to report for active duty; and a catch-all "other."

Where is the separation request sent?

The recruiter does not have the authority to grant separations and will try to re-sell the military to the recruit. Therefore, the

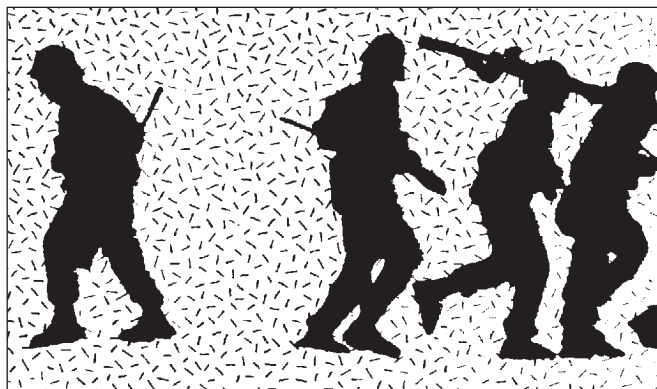
letter requesting separation should be addressed to "Commander" at the recruiting station where the recruit signed up. You can look up the address of the recruiting station in the phone book (under U.S. Government) or look on the enlistment agreement. Keep a copy of the letter.

What happens after the letter is sent?

The military will review the letter and process the request. The recruit might be asked to appear at the recruiting station for a brief interview but this is not necessary, and, in fact, is not recommended. The recruiter may aggressively try to change your mind and if it doesn't work, may then try to trick you into reporting to a military base or facility. Once you have sent your separation request letter, there is no need for further contact with the recruiter or recruiting station. (If the military turns down the initial request or tells you you must report to a military base or facility to get discharged, contact the GI Rights Hotline, 800.394.9544.) When the request has been processed, the military issues a void enlistment or uncharacterized separation that will not affect the recruit's record or career.

Where can I get help or more information?

It is helpful to talk to a GI rights counselor about your letter before sending it and to verify that you are, in fact, in the DEP and not some other enlisted status. To reach the nearest free counseling service, call the GI Rights Hotline. ■



The above advice is based mostly on information provided by the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors. For more details, visit the CCCO Web site, www.objector.org, or call the GI Rights Hotline, 800.394.9544.