



# **Recruiting and Retention: An Overview of FY2008 and FY2009 Results for Active and Reserve Component Enlisted Personnel**

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## Summary

This report provides a brief overview of the recruiting and retention rates for Active and Reserve Component enlisted personnel during FY2008 and FY2009. 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 quantity goals and accepted lower quality recruits. However, these concerns have recently been mitigated by the more favorable recruiting and retention environment brought about by rising 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 and retention results for FY2008 and FY2009 are summarized below. This report will be updated as necessary.

**FY2008—Active Components.** All the Services achieved their recruit quantity goals. The Army again missed the goal for High School Diploma Graduates, one of the Department of Defense's key quality benchmarks, though by a lesser amount than in FY2007. The other Services met or exceeded both of the established benchmarks. The Army also exceeded its retention goals and the Navy only fell short of its mid-career goal by a very small margin. While exceeding its career retention goal, the Marine Corps fell significantly short of its first-term retention goal. However, this should be viewed in light of a large first-term retention goal, which was related to increasing the size of the Marine Corps. The Air Force missed all three of its retention goals by large margins, although the results appear to have been distorted by the implementation of new goal-setting and achievement-measuring methodologies by the Air Force.

**FY2008—Reserve Components.** All of the Reserve Components met their recruit quantity goals. While showing improvement over FY2007, the Army Reserve just missed meeting both of the quality indicators and the Army National Guard just missed the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) benchmark. All of the Reserve Components met their retention goals except for the Air Force Reserve, which missed its goal by a small margin.

**FY2009—Active Components.** All the Services 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. Retention has also been very strong. All of the Services exceeded their retention goals, with the Army and Marine Corps doing so by sizable margins.

**FY2009—Reserve Components.** All of the Reserve Components met or exceeded their recruit quantity goals, while increasing the level of recruit quality. Both the Army Reserve and the Army National Guard—which had failed to meet one or both quality benchmarks in prior years—exceeded the quality benchmarks. Through August, all of the reserve components were comfortably on track to meet their annual retention goals.

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This report provides a brief overview of the recruiting and retention rates for Active and Reserve Component enlisted personnel during FY2008 and FY2009. 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 accepted lower quality recruits in order to meet its recruit quantity goals. However, these concerns have recently been mitigated by the more favorable recruiting and retention environment brought about by rising 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"<sup>1</sup> each fiscal year. Officer and enlisted goals are set separately. There are both "quantity"<sup>2</sup> and "quality"<sup>3</sup> goals for the enlisted force.

### Active Components

The recruiting data presented in **Table 1** below reflects that all of the Active Components met their enlisted accession *quantity* goals in both FY2008 and FY2009. The recruiting data presented in **Table 2** show the performance of the Active Components with respect to the Department of Defense (DOD) enlisted accession *quality* benchmarks for those same years. The two principal

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

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).<sup>4</sup>

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 post-Cold War drawdown of the early and mid-1990s allowed the services to be highly selective in who they allowed to join. This was followed by a 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 over the past few years is provided below, followed by a briefer summary of the other services' results.

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 10<sup>th</sup> through 30<sup>th</sup> percentile). This 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 “Grow 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 in FY2005-FY2007 rose to about 4% of total accessions.<sup>5</sup> 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, raising the maximum age for enlistees from 35 to 42<sup>6</sup>, relaxed some existing standards (such as the prohibition on tattoos on the neck and hands), increased enlistment bonuses

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<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> DOD regulations requires that no more than 4% of an annual enlistment cohort may be Category IV (10<sup>th</sup> -30<sup>th</sup> percentile on the AFQT). In addition, no one in Category V (1<sup>st</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> 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>.

<sup>6</sup> Section 543, P.L. 109-163 increases the maximum allowable age for enlistment from 35 to 42.

from \$20,000 to \$40,000,<sup>7</sup> and increased the number of medical and misconduct<sup>8</sup> waivers being granted.<sup>9</sup>

**Table 1. Accession Data (Quantity) for Active Component Enlisted Personnel, FY2008 and FY2009**

Service	FY2008 (Goal)	FY2008 (Achieved)	FY2008 (Percent of Goal)	FY2009 (Goal)	FY2009 (Achieved)	FY2009 (Percent of Goal)
Army	80,000	80,517	100.7%	65,000	70,045	107.8%
Navy	38,419	38,485	100.2%	35,500	35,527	100.1%
Marine Corps	37,967	37,991	100.1%	31,400	31,413	100.0%
Air Force	27,800	27,848	100.2%	31,980	31,983	100.0%

**Source:** Data provided by the 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, FY2008 and FY2009**

Service	DOD Quality Benchmarks		FY2008 (Achieved)		FY2009 (Achieved)	
	HSDG	AFQT CAT I-III A	HSDG	AFQT CAT I-III A	HSDG	AFQT CAT I-III A
Army	90%	60%	83%	62%	95%	66%
Navy	90%	60%	94%	74%	95%	78%
Marine Corps	90%	60%	96%	66%	99%	71%
Air Force	90%	60%	98%	79%	99%	81%

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

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

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 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

<sup>7</sup>Section 635, P.L. 109-163.

<sup>8</sup> Misconduct waivers are used for a wide range of pre-enlistment misconduct including drug use, traffic violations, misdemeanors, and felonies.

<sup>9</sup> The following are the total number of waivers approved by the Army and the percentage of Army non-prior service enlisted accessions with waivers 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.

were enlisted with waivers for conduct by about 10%.<sup>10</sup> Improvements in Army recruit quality accelerated remarkably in FY2009. Aided by a more favorable recruiting environment generated by rising unemployment rates and an improved security situation in Iraq, and needing about one-fifth fewer recruits due to the completion of the “Grow the Army” force expansion which occurred during FY2004-FY2008, the Army was able to be much more selective in who it accepted. As a result, the Army was able to exceed its quantity goal by 8% while recruit quality shot up dramatically: 95% of new accessions in FY2009 were high school diploma graduates, 66% scored above average on the AFQT, and just 1.5% were Category IV.

While the Marine Corps was experiencing 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—it was less affected by them. In FY2004, 97% of Marine Corps 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 allow in 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. Less than 1% (0.7%) were classified as Category IV.

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 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 in FY2008 and FY2009, and both experienced some improvements in recruit quality. The Navy’s HSDG rate rose from 93% in FY2007 to 96% in FY2009, while its above-average AFQT rate rose from 73% to 78%. The Air Force’s HSDG rate dropped one percentage point in FY2008, but returned to 99% in FY2009; its above-average AFQT rate rose from 79% in FY2007 to 81% in FY2009.

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<sup>10</sup> While the FY2008 conduct waiver figures are still above the levels for FY2006 – and well above the levels for FY2003-FY2005 – the downward movement from FY2007 is noteworthy. Of particular significance, in FY2008 the Army reduced the number of waivers for felony convictions from 511 to 372. 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>).

## 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 FY2008 and FY2009. 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.<sup>11</sup>

The recruiting trends for the reserve components were similar to those of their active component counterparts in some respects. 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 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. However, these indicators of recruiting difficulties appeared a bit earlier (FY2003) than for the active components and began rebounding earlier as well (FY2006).

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 relatively low 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 authorized end-strength at the end of FY2005.<sup>12</sup> 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%.

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.<sup>13</sup> Recruit quality also improved during this time frame, with the HSDG metric rising from 83% in FY2005 to 91% in FY2006-FY2008, and then to 94% in FY2009. Its proportion of recruits with above average AFQT scores remained level at 57% in FY2006-FY2008, but increased to 59% in FY2008 and then jumped dramatically to 74% in FY2009.

The Army Reserve also improved its recruiting from the perspective of quantity from FY2006-FY2009, meeting or nearly meeting 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%

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<sup>11</sup> See the section entitled “Active Components” earlier in this report for a description of the DOD quality benchmarks.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> 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).



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.<sup>14</sup> 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 showed a dramatic improvement in recruit quality. The percentage of recruits with a high school diploma shot up to 97%, while the percentage scoring above average on the AFQT increased to 63%.

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-FY2009 period. The Marine Corps Reserve and Air Force Reserve met their quantity goals in each of these years. The Air National Guard missed its 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 Naval 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.<sup>15</sup> No clear pattern emerges with respect to the quantity metrics of these reserve components.<sup>16</sup> Some of the quality metrics showed improvement over time, while others declined. For example, the Air Force Reserve saw its HSDG rate drop from 93% in FY2003 to 87% in FY2005, but then increase to 96% in FY2006 and 99% in subsequent years. The HSDG rate for the Navy Reserve increased from 86% in FY2006 to 94% in FY2009. On the other hand, the Marine Corps Reserve experienced a gradual decline in above-average AFQT rates from 80% in FY2003 to 73% in FY2009 (although remaining well above the benchmark of 60%). Other quality metrics remained fairly stable<sup>17</sup> or fluctuated without a clear trend upwards or downwards.<sup>18</sup>

However, a broader and more positive trend does emerge from the quality data of all six of these reserve component. 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,

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<sup>14</sup> 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 approximately 206,000).

<sup>15</sup> The authorized end-strength for the Naval Reserve has been declined by about 21,000 from 2003 through 2009, dropping from 88,156 at the end of FY2003 to roughly 67,000 at the end of FY2009, 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 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 Naval 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 Naval Reserve, before the Senate Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee on March 3, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> This may be due in part to data gaps. The Air National Guard experienced problems with its HSDG data in FY2003-FY2004, as did the Navy Reserve in FY2005 for both HSDG and AFQT data, thereby making it more difficult to evaluate the quality data for those components.

<sup>17</sup> For example, the HSDG rate for the Marine Corps Reserve remained between 95% and 98% from FY2003 to FY2009; the Air Force Reserve maintained an above average AFQT rate of 73% from FY2003-FY2009 except in FY2005 (69%) and FY2006 (75%); the Air National Guard had an above average AFQT rate of 70% in FY2003, 79% in FY2004, and 72% in FY2005, but has since maintained it at 75-77%.

<sup>18</sup> For example, the Navy Reserve's HSDG rate fluctuated as follows: FY2003 (84%), FY2004 (96%), FY2005 (n.a.), FY2006 (86%), FY2007 (90%), FY2008 (91%), FY2009 (94%).

and dropped back to two in FY2007 and 2008. For FY2009, every reserve component met both its quality goals, in many cases by substantial margins.<sup>19</sup>

**Table 3. Recruiting Data (Quantity) for Reserve Component Enlisted Personnel, FY2008 and FY2009**

Reserve Component	FY2008 (Goal)	FY2008 (Achieved)	FY2008 (Percent of Goal)	FY2009 (Goal)	FY2009 (Achieved)	FY2009 (Percent of Goal)
Army National Guard	63,000	65,192	103.5%	56,000	56,071	100.1%
Army Reserve	37,500	39,870	106.3%	34,598	36,189	104.6%
Navy Reserve	9,122	9,134	100.1%	7,743	7,793	100.7%
Marine Corps Reserve	7,628	7,628	100.0%	7,194	8,805	122.4%
Air National Guard	8,548	10,749	125.8%	9,500	10,075	106.1%
Air Force Reserve	6,963	7,323	105.2%	7,863	8,604	109.4%

Source: Data provided by the Department of Defense.

**Table 4. Recruiting Data (Quality) for Non-Prior Service Reserve Component Enlisted Personnel, FY2008 and FY2009**

Reserve Component	DOD Quality Benchmarks		FY2008 (Achieved)		FY2009 (Achieved)	
	HSDG	AFQT CAT I-III A	HSDG	AFQT CAT I-III A	HSDG	AFQT CAT I-III A
Army National Guard	90%	60%	91%	59%	94%	76%
Army Reserve	90%	60%	89%	58%	97%	63%
Navy Reserve	90%	60%	91%	62%	94%	75%
Marine Corps Reserve	90%	60%	97%	75%	98%	73%
Air National Guard	90%	60%	98%	75%	91%	77%
Air Force Reserve	90%	60%	99%	73%	99%	73%

Source: Data provided by the Department of Defense.

## 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 and, particularly, FY2009. FY2009 was a remarkably strong recruiting year for all the

<sup>19</sup> 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.

Services and their reserve components, but 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 unemployment dropped from 2003 through 2007 (falling from 6.0% in 2003 to 4.6% for 2006 and 2007) and then climbing to 5.8% in 2008 and up to 9.8% in September, 2009.<sup>20</sup>

Another 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 and then to 70 for the first nine months of 2009.<sup>21</sup> A third factor which positively affected recruiting in the 2008-2009 period was the completion of the 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. However, in July 2009, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced plans to temporarily increase the size of the Army by another 22,000 soldiers.<sup>22</sup> As a result, the Army raised its accession goal from 65,000 in FY2009 to 74,500 in FY2010.

## 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.<sup>23</sup> Imbalances in the retention rate can cause problems within the military personnel system.<sup>24</sup> 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.

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<sup>20</sup> Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, available at <http://www.bls.gov/>.

<sup>21</sup> DOD casualty data for Iraq available at <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/oif-total-by-month.pdf>. On the other hand, casualties in Afghanistan have risen in 2008 and 2009, but the numbers are still well 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 and 192 for the first nine months of 2009. DOD casualty data for Afghanistan available at <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/oeftmonth.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> John J. Kruzal, "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/>.

<sup>23</sup> 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 Instructions 1304.25.

<sup>24</sup> If too few people stay in, the military will suffer from a lack of experienced leaders, decreased military efficiency and lower job satisfaction. If too many people stay in, promotion opportunities decrease and a higher percentage of people must be involuntarily separated in order to prevent the organization from becoming "top heavy" with middle and upper level leaders. Each of these outcomes, in turn, 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 FY2008 and 2009, and exceeded them by fairly large margins. This retention success has been a key factor in enabling the Army to complete its “Grow the Army” initiative about two years ahead of schedule. 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 eight 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 both of its retention goals in FY2009 by significant margins. It did fall about 13% short of its FY2008 “first term”<sup>25</sup> goal, but this was due to an exceptionally high retention goal 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,<sup>26</sup> it nonetheless achieved a much higher retention *rate* than it did in FY2006. As noted by Lieutenant General Ronald Coleman in testimony before the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Personnel and Readiness:

In Fiscal Year 2008, the Marine Corps reenlisted 16,696 Marines including an unprecedented 8,243 First Term Marines. This achievement represented the highest retention rate ever, almost 36 percent, among the eligible First Term population compared to 31 percent in Fiscal Year 2007 and 22 percent in Fiscal Year 2006. Similarly, the Marine Corps achieved a remarkable 77 percent retention rate among the eligible career force compared with 70 percent in Fiscal Year 2007 and 65 percent in Fiscal Year 2006. This achievement contributed to exceeding the annual milestone in our end strength increase plan while maintaining all quality standards.<sup>27</sup>

The Navy met two of its retention goals in FY2008, and fell just short of its Zone B goal. It improved upon that in FY2009, exceeding all three of its retention goals. 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 by the Air Force.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, concerns about meeting its reenlistment goals led the Air Force to triple its funding for new Selective Reenlistment Bonuses in FY2009.<sup>29</sup> It also refined its methodology for counting reenlistments to include those

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<sup>25</sup> See **Table 5** for definitions of the various retention categories for each of the Services.

<sup>26</sup> It achieved 92.4% of its “first term” goal in FY2007 and 86.7% in FY2008.

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Congress, House Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Military Personnel, *Fiscal Year 2010 National Defense Authorization Budget Request on Military Personnel Overview*, 111<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> 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](http://armedservices.house.gov/pdfs/MP052109/Coleman_Testimony052109.pdf), p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> 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).

<sup>29</sup> In FY2008, the Air Force paid \$59 million to 4,011 airmen for initial payments under the Selective Reenlistment Bonus program. In FY2009, it estimates it will have paid \$156 million to 12,089 airmen for initial payments under the program. Department of the Air Force, *Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 Budget Estimate, Military Personnel Appropriation*, May 2009, <http://www.saffm.hq.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-090511-038.pdf>, p. 61.

previously omitted.<sup>30</sup> As a result, the Air Force was able to meet, or nearly meet, all of its reenlistment goals in FY2009.

**Table 5. Active Component Enlisted Retention Data,  
FY2008 and FY2009**

Service/ Retention Category	FY2008 (Goal)	FY2008 (Achieved)	FY2008 (Percent of Goal)	FY2009 (Goal)	FY2009 (Achieved)	FY2009 (Percent of Goal)
<b>Army<sup>a</sup></b>						
Initial Term	27,900	31,866	114.2%	19,250	26,524	137.8%
Mid Career	21,500	24,455	113.7%	23,100	25,871	112.0%
Career	15,600	17,592	112.7%	12,650	15,992	126.4%
<b>Navy<sup>b</sup></b>						
Zone A	12,700	13,005	102.4%	13,300	14,295	107.5%
Zone B	8,500	8,358	98.3%	9,400	10,123	107.7%
Zone C	5,000	5,147	102.9%	6,000	6,477	108.0%
<b>Air Force<sup>c</sup></b>						
Zone A	15,562	9,892	63.6%	17,296	17,518	101.3%
Zone B	7,129	5,977	83.8%	9,892	9,869	99.8%
Zone C	6,041	4,781	79.1%	8,346	8,211	98.4%
<b>Marine Corps<sup>d</sup></b>						
First Term	9,507	8,243	86.7%	7,334	8,011	109.2%
Subsequent	8,124	8,453	104.1%	7,464	7,990	107.1%

**Source:** Data provided by the Department of Defense.

- a. 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.
- b. 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).
- c. 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).
- d. 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.

<sup>30</sup> If the FY2009 methodology were applied to the FY2008 reenlistments, the FY2008 results would have been 79% (Zone A), 94% (Zone B), and 88% (Zone C). (Author's discussion with Air Force enlisted analysis staff).

## Reserve Components

The Department of Defense tracks Reserve Component retention via attrition rates. Attrition rates are a measure of the ratio of people who leave the reserves in a given year; they are the inverse of retention rates, which measure the ratio of people who stay in the service. Attrition goals are thus a maximum rate or ceiling, which the various Reserve Components try not to exceed. The data show all of the Reserve Components achieved enlisted attrition rates below these ceilings for FY2008 (see **Table 6**).

The FY2009 reserve attrition data is only complete through August, but it is on track to be better than FY2008 for all of the reserve components except the Army National Guard. The Army National Guard may have slightly higher attrition in FY2009 than in FY2008,<sup>31</sup> although it should still finish the year with an attrition rate below or just above its ceiling.<sup>32</sup> In comparison to FY2008, the Army Reserve and Naval Reserve are on track to achieve noticeably lower attrition rates. The Army Reserve had an attrition rate of 19.5% for the first eleven months of FY2008 compared to 15.5% for a similar period in FY2009. For the Navy Reserve, the attrition rates for the first eleven months of FY2008 and FY2009 were 27.8% and 21.5%, respectively.

**Table 6. Reserve Component Enlisted Attrition Data, FY2008 and FY2009**

Reserve Component	FY2008 (Ceiling)	FY2008 (Achieved)	FY2009 (Ceiling)	FY2009 (Achieved Through August)
<b>Army National Guard</b>	19.5%	18.9%	19.5%	17.7%
<b>Army Reserve</b>	28.6%	21.1%	28.6%	15.5%
<b>Naval Reserve</b>	36.0%	30.2%	36.0%	21.5%
<b>Marine Corps Reserve</b>	30.0%	25.3%	30.0%	22.2%
<b>Air National Guard</b>	12.0%	10.2%	12.0%	8.4%
<b>Air Force Reserve</b>	18.0%	18.7%	18.0%	14.8%

**Source:** Data provided by the Department of Defense.

## Analysis

The fact that retention for the Active and Reserve Components has remained generally strong in recent years may seem counterintuitive, given the high operational tempo and large scale reserve mobilizations that have occurred since September 11, 2001, and especially since the invasion and occupation of Iraq. However, a number of studies indicate that deployments can enhance retention, perhaps by providing participants with a sense of accomplishment.<sup>33</sup> However, some of

<sup>31</sup> The Army National Guard's attrition rate through August of 2008 was 16.9%, while it was 17.7% through August of 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Additionally, if the Army National Guard were to exceed its attrition ceiling, the significance of this would be decreased by the robust strength of the Army National Guard at present. In fact, the Army National Guard may choose to increase attrition slightly in order to keep its actual strength in line with its authorized strength.

<sup>33</sup> See for example 2009 RAND report. See also James Hosek and Mark Totten, *Does Perstempo Hurt Reenlistment?* (continued...)

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 eight 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.<sup>34</sup>

## 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

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(...continued)

*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.

<sup>34</sup> 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/2009/RAND\\_RB9468.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/2009/RAND_RB9468.pdf). Full report available at [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND\\_MG873.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG873.pdf).

may elect to apply additional resources to these mechanisms. Conversely, when recruiting or retention are stronger than anticipated, 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 has led to a reconsideration of the appropriate level of funding for recruiting and retention programs. For example, the Obama administration’s FY2010 budget request proposed an \$800 million reduction—about 11%—in the Defense Department’s recruiting and retention budget.<sup>35</sup> The House version of the FY10 Defense Appropriations Bill contains about \$158 million in additional cuts to enlistment bonuses, reenlistment bonuses, and advertising beyond what the administration proposed,<sup>36</sup> while the Senate version contains about \$141 million in additional cuts to enlistment bonuses, reenlistment bonuses, and advertising, as well as a \$20 million reduction in training funds related to Army National Guard recruiting and retention.<sup>37</sup>

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 fade. One of the main factors contributing to the strong recruiting and retention environment of FY2009—a relatively high unemployment rate—will likely continue for several years.<sup>38</sup> However, the level of violence in Afghanistan is on the upswing, and this could make recruiting and retention more challenging if it continues (as 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 retention and modestly higher recruiting goals than needed in FY2009. 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 110<sup>th</sup> Congress.<sup>39</sup> 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.

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<sup>35</sup> Frederick W. Baker III, “Proposed Recruiting Cuts ‘Reasonable’, Pentagon Official Says,” American Forces Press Service, May 12, 2009, <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=54306>. 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\\_SJ.pdf](http://comptroller.defense.gov/defbudget/fy2010/fy2010_SJ.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> H.Rept. 111-230, *Department of Defense Appropriations Bill, 2010, Report of the Committee on Appropriations to Accompany H.R. 3326*, pp. 27, 31, 35, 39, 53, 73, 80 and 89.

<sup>37</sup> S.Rept. 111-74, *Department of Defense Appropriations Bill, 2010, Report to Accompany H.R. 3326*, pp. 15, 31, 33, 45, 53, and 72. Figure cited does not include reductions in report designated as “transfer to OCO” [transferred to Overseas Contingency Operations appropriation].

<sup>38</sup> According to the Congressional Budget Office’s forecast, “... the unemployment rate continues to rise, climbing from 9.3 percent this year to an average of 10.2 percent next year (peaking at 10.4 percent around the middle of the year), and then falls to 9.1 percent in 2011.” Congressional Budget Office, *The Budget and Economic Outlook: An Update*, Washington, DC, August 2009, p. 4, [http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/105xx/doc10521/2009BudgetUpdate\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/105xx/doc10521/2009BudgetUpdate_Summary.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> 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.



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