Do you enjoy having someone constantly telling you what to do and how to do it? If not, you may have a hard time with military life. The military places numerous restrictions on behavior that would not be acceptable in civilian society. Military members are subject to military law 24 hours a day—even when off duty and off base—until the end of their term. Disobedience in the military can result in court-martial, prison, or the lifetime problem of a bad discharge. If you can't finish your first enlistment term, you could lose all or part of the education and other benefits you were promised and be forced to pay back any "bonus" you received. Historically, about one-third of all new recruits do not finish their first term. 40% of Army recruits don't (Army News Service, 10/23/2014). Furthermore, section C.9.b of the enlistment agreement says your status, pay, benefits and responsibilities in the military can change without warning and REGARDLESS of any promises in your agreement! And the military has the right to keep you past your discharge date. In the eight years from Sept. 11, 2001, 186,000 people were kept from leaving the military when their terms were up (Armed Forces Press Service, 11/2/2009).

**WHAT ARE SOME THINGS I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT MILITARY LIFE?**

- If you leave your work without permission or don't show up, you can be put in jail.
- Any disobedience can result in criminal punishment.
- You can be punished without the right to see a lawyer or have a trial.
- You may be ordered to commit acts that violate your most basic values, like killing another human being.
- Your ability to spend time with your parents, partner, and other family members will be severely limited.
- You will be subject to routine urine tests for drugs.

**WHAT ABOUT PROMISES OF BONUSES?**

Enlistment “bonuses” are not really bonuses paid just for joining; they are usually paid out over time, and you could have to pay back the money if you don’t complete certain requirements. Bonuses are not given to everyone, and when they are offered, the higher amounts are either given to people with special technical skills or who sign up for a longer term, or they are used to push people into very risky hard-to-fill jobs, like field bomb disposal (Rand report MG950, 2010).

**IS COLLEGE MONEY FREE AND GUARANTEED?**

Recruiters might promise that you’ll get to go to college “free,” but it’s not free—you must work for it! And the benefits will not be guaranteed.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill offers more money than in the past to those who qualify, and it allows military members to transfer unused financial aid to other family members, but there are conditions and possible problems you should know about for example:

- People must enlist for a total of 10 years to transfer unused college benefits to family members.
- People who receive a less than fully honorable discharge lose all GI benefits. This includes “general discharges,” which are often given for minor problems with military duties.

- Those who leave the military early, as one in three do, may get reduced or no benefits.
- Veterans who wish to attend college outside the state where they live may only get a small part of their total tuition covered. In 2015 the average extra tuition cost at a public four-year college was $14,480/year for nonresidents (Trends in College Pricing, College Board).

In 2014, 16.9% of the enlisted personnel were African American, but they are represented only up to 8.5% of the commissioned officers. “Hispanics” made up 13% of the enlisted ranks, but only 5.9% of the commissioned officers (Dept. of Defense Populations, Representation, 2014). The military claims it treats everyone the same, regardless of skin color; but in reality, it has serious problems with inequality in the ranks. One study found that even though the number of women, African Americans, Asians and “Hispanics” have increased over time, they are less likely to get promoted than white males and continue to be underrepresented in the senior officer ranks (Rand report TR1159, 2012).

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**IS THERE DISCRIMINATION IN THE MILITARY?**

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**WHAT ABOUT WOMEN AND LGBTQ PEOPLE KNOW?**

In addition to the dangers of war, women experience a special problem in the military: they are sexually assaulted, twice the rate for civilians (N.Y. Times, 2/26/13). And when assaults are reported, the rate of prosecution is very low, meaning the victims often must continue working in a hostile workplace. These problems still exist despite many years of promises to do something about them.

**WILL I LOSE SOME BASIC RIGHTS?**

- You may be ordered to commit acts that violate your most basic values, like killing another human being.
- Your ability to spend time with your parents, partner, and other family members will be severely limited.
- You will be subject to routine urine tests for drugs.

**WHAT SHOULD WOMEN AND LGBTQ PEOPLE KNOW?**

Some people have been told by recruiters that they won’t be sent to war or see combat because they are promised a non-combat job, they’ll be in the National Guard, or Reserve forces. They are going to be officers, or they are female. Some have been told that current wars will be over before they finish training. But in 2012, almost all of the categories have been sent to combat zones. At one point half the troops in the Iraq war were from the Reserves or National Guard. Also, thousands of people in the Navy and Air Force were given dangerous ground duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, in wars that have lasted 10-13 years.

* How some recruiters bend the rules: “You’ll be told to call Johnny or Susan and tell them to lie and say they’ve never had asthma like they told you, that they don’t have a juvenile criminal history, that recruiters are going to beat the rulebook and get the lies told and process the fraudulent paperwork.” — Lawrence Kagawa, retired after 10 years of recruiting, Time Magazine, 4/2/09.

**CAN THE MILITARY GIVE ME CITIZENSHIP?**

No. Citizenship is granted by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, NOT the military. You can apply for citizenship more quickly in the military, but you can also apply after you are out by using Form N-400, Petition to Naturalize 2003-2014 (Al Jazeera, 5/8/2015). Then you could still be kept in the military and possibly be sent to war. Even if you get citizenship, it can be revoked if you receive a less than fully honorable discharge, and you might then be deported. For more information, please see the back of this for groups to contact.
Many good people join the military because they want to make a difference, to serve others. This is a great goal, but after joining you may find out that it’s not the kind of service you expected, and then it would be too late to change your mind.

Presidents have ordered our military to attack and occupy countries that never threatened us, like Vietnam, Grenada, Panama and Iraq. Instead of defending their country, some military members have felt they were used to defend oppressive governments or the profits of oil companies. But they had no choice unless they were willing to refuse orders and go to jail.

If service is your goal, it’s important to ask yourself some hard questions: Regardless of the rank or military job you are given, would you be willing to support missions you might not believe in and actions that could cause great destruction and the loss of many innocent lives? Would you care that the U.S. military is the worst polluter in the world? Would you be willing to share responsibility for such things in order to get money for college or the job you are given, or to support missions you don’t understand? Would you be willing to refuse missions that could cause great destruction and the loss of many innocent lives? Would you care that the military is offering you?

Would you be willing to share responsibility for such things in order to get money for college or the job you are given, or to support missions you don’t understand? Would you be willing to refuse missions that could cause great destruction and the loss of many innocent lives? Would you care that the military is offering you?

A huge difference in many people’s lives.

Are you prepared to fight in any war, in any place, at any time that the government orders you to?

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Have you checked out all the college financial aid and job training and placement possibilities in your community?

Is the military something you want to do, or are you being pressured into it by other people?

Besides talking to a military recruiter, have you spoken to any of the many veterans who didn’t like the military? Why didn’t they make the military a career?

If you become unhappy after you enlist, do you know how hard it could be to get out?

If you get a less-than-honorable discharge, do you know how it can hurt your future?

9 THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN YOU TALK TO A RECRUITER

1) Recruiters are not guidance counselors. They are interested in you because if they don’t meet their quota of recruits, they can be forced to work overtime or be punished other ways. One veteran recruiter told a reporter for the Albany Times Union, “I’ve been recruiting for years and I don’t know one recruiter who wasn’t dishonest about it. I did it myself.”

2) Get a copy of the military enlistment agreement (form DD4) and read it carefully, especially page two, before you sign any papers. Download it here: http://www.projectyano.org/pdf/dd0004.pdf

3) Talk the enlistment agreement over with your parents and friends, or with a counselor from the GI Rights Hotline. Ask about any parts of the agreement that you don’t understand.

4) Take along a parent or friend as a witness if you go see a recruiter. Then you’ll have somebody to back up your side of the story if there is a dispute over what was promised.

5) If you have a police record or medical condition, don’t hide it. even if the recruiter tells you it doesn’t matter.

6) GET ALL PROMISES IN WRITING and have them signed by the recruitment representative! Spoken promises are worthless, but also remember that even written ones can be changed under the contract.

7) Get copies of everything you sign. Keep them in a safe place.

8) If you want a special enlistment option, be sure to ask the recruiter questions like the following: For how long do I have to enlist to get this option? What happens if I don’t meet them, but I’ve already enlisted? If there is no space later in the training program or job that I signed up for? For options that include assignment to a particular base or area: Am I guaranteed this assignment for the entire time I’m in?

9) REMEMBER: If you don’t like your new job, they don’t have to let you switch, and you can’t quit!

Early discharges can be hard to get without a penalty.

FINDING A NON-MILITARY JOB

Looking for a job can be a challenge. Some helpful advice and job search tools are available from the Web sites below.

Career InfoNet: www.careeronestop.org
Idealist.org: www.idealist.org
Teens4Hire: www.teens4hire.org
CareerBuilder.com: www.careerbuilder.com
AmeriCorps: www.nationalservice.gov

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Watch “Before You Enlist,” a video of military veterans, including a former recruiter, sharing their stories: www.beforeyouenlistlist.org

Also, contact:
Project on Youth and Non-Military Opportunities (Project YANO)
P.O. Box 230157, Encinitas, CA 92023
(760) 634-3604; www.projectyano.org

War Resisters League
168 Canal St., Suite 600, New York, NY 10013
(212) 228-0450; www.warresisters.org

GI Rights Hotline: www.girighthotline.org
(877) 447-4487

Local contact:

To order this brochure in bulk, contact War Resisters League. Produced by Project YANO, with thanks to the Left Tilt Fund. Artwork: Matt Heft. 8/11/2016.