



Coast Guard Flag Voice 57

RECRUITING PROGRESS

In earlier Flag Voices, I described our renewed efforts to recruit our enlisted military active duty and reserve work force -- the Commandant's number one priority as we continue to experience a shortfall of people since "streamlining" in 1995. I also called on Team Coast Guard to help. I am pleased to report all our collective efforts are paying off.

First, to recap the recruiting environment. Attracting and accessing new Coast Guard people remains a formidable challenge. We are up against enhanced salary and benefit options available from corporate America, exceptionally low unemployment, the accelerating trend of high school graduates to pursue college directly out of high school, the declining propensity of America's youth to seek a military career, and a limited budget for necessary critical recruiting and retention initiatives. Further, we directly compete with the other Armed Forces branches in recruiting.

In the face of these challenges, we took substantial measures to rebuild our downsized recruiting capability and fund our recruiting and retention initiatives. In an effort to restore our work force to full strength, in FY98 we first implemented 28 new or enhanced recruiting and retention tools, such as offering recruits guaranteed specialty training, guaranteed geographic locations, deferring "up-or-out" advancement criteria, and increasing enlistment bonuses. Beginning in FY99, we implemented a "Workforce Restoration" Plan, a two-year strategy for active duty and one-year for reserve forces.

We have done remarkably well in FY99, a year that included much change. We added 125 new and replaced 32 tour-complete recruiters (about half the recruiting force, while training more than 150 to date), obtained and equipped 37 new recruiting offices nationally at "targeted" locations, deployed modern technology by using remote access laptop computers, and tried new advertising strategies, all while facing an ever more intensely competitive recruiting environment. Currently, we are more than 370 recruits ahead of last year's progress in total enlisted recruiting (active duty and reserve), have achieved full reserve strength (8,000), and likely will achieve our active duty enlisted mission (stretch goal) of 4150. Clearly, our progress is remarkable by any standard and our average cost for accessing an enlisted recruit is significantly lower than the other services'. Coast Guard recruiting deserves a tremendous amount of credit for effectively changing the tires as we go down the road at 60 mph - we upped mission performance during a time of much chaos and challenge. But so does Team CG, with exceptional support from the CG Auxiliary and individual units and members (awarded six Achievement Medals and more than 200 Commandant's Letters of Commendation).

This was an especially interesting time for all the services. All either continue to fall short of mission (desired number of recruits for the year) or are working extraordinarily hard just to meet it. While the

Coast Guard has done well in overall numbers, we continue to fall short of our desired outcomes in certain diversity areas, particularly African-Americans and women.

It is clear during these times it will take great initiative to get the 17-21 age group to hear our message. As many are aware, we advertised on World Wrestling Federation (WWF) telecasts (see Flag Voice 30) to raise the Coast Guard's visibility among our target audience and create leads for recruiters. Although this has met with some controversy (ardently pro and con), we believe our campaign accomplished these objectives, generating more than 6,000 recruiting leads. The WWF website is the leading source of click-throughs to the Coast Guard Recruiting Center's website, with 85,000 visits since the campaign began. We believe this part of our advertising campaign helped us be successful this year.

The military services added substantial resources these last two years - more recruiters, increased bonus programs, and notably additional TV advertising. After their enormous outlays in advertising while still falling short of goals, DoD had an outside consultant thoroughly review how they have spent advertising dollars. The resulting recommendations and planned action items will substantially refocus their efforts. What they found and we ourselves are learning through our own experiences as we too struggle to make the most of our limited advertising dollars includes these lessons:

- Develop an overall marketing plan, of which advertising is just one part. The services do not have adequate in-house marketing and advertising expertise; they need to develop and acquire it.
- Learn more about the opinions, habits, and attitudes of the youth we are working to attract to support marketing and better target advertising.
- Effective advertising includes both "awareness" to raise our visibility (the general knowledge of our existence and what we do) and "influence" to generate "leads" (causes action, e.g., a potential recruit calls a recruiter to get additional information on career options).
- Take advantage of evolving technology by enhanced Internet advertising and recruiting.

We are well aware no one advertising form will meet all our needs forever. Using the WWF was just one of the many ways we are trying to get out the Coast Guard recruiting message. We decided not to renew the contract when it expires at the end of this calendar year. Most of the contract agreement already has been met but a few spots remain. Business as usual will not work during these times and we must be willing to try new ways to recruit "America's best." We are constantly exploring other opportunities and will try other advertising combinations, including Internet advertising, print media, and various public service electronic media initiatives, to best market ourselves. We will aggressively pursue those opportunities to raise awareness of the Coast Guard among our target recruitment audience and generate leads for recruiters.

FY00 is an especially heavy lift -- we will need to bring in about 800 more recruits than we did this year. Our "Workforce Restoration" Plan calls for us to achieve full complement by the end of the FY. Beginning in FY00, all the new recruiting offices will be "on line" and we will have more trained recruiters in the field than ever before. Given appropriate resources, we are confident of our ability to reach full strength -- our organizational readiness depends on it!

I know I can continue to count on your continued help -- your assistance will be one of the keys to meeting this daunting challenge.

Regards, FL Ames

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