

Right to recruit?

by Scott Camil

This is in response to an article in the Gainesville Sun, Aug. 10th, by Tiffany Pakkala, entitled "Right to Recruit." I have been asked by the G.I. Rights Hotline to respond to this article because we believe that important information was left out and that some information needs clarification. %ÛÓScott Camil

The decision to enlist in the military is actually a life or death decision in many ways and it is important for our young people to have all the facts in order to make a good decision. We call this the right to give informed consent. As counselors for the G.I. Rights Hotline, we deal daily with calls from those in our armed forces who have not gotten what they believe they were promised by their recruiters.

Captain Jenny Cline, the officer in charge of army recruiting in our area, was quoted saying, "Our recruiters are focusing on young people to provide opportunities, not to meet a quota, not to make a number." She then goes on to say that if the recruiters fail, the military fails. Captain Cline says, "If no one meets with recruiters and no one agrees to be recruited, there will be no army." It is obvious from this statement that the goal of recruiters is to get recruits, not to "provide opportunities." Do you really believe that the U.S. government spends \$2.7 billion a year to "provide opportunities" rather than to meet its recruiting goals?

As a matter of fact, military personnel can be court-martialed and imprisoned for making any public comments that are contrary to the official line or are critical of policy or the president. So if you join the military, be prepared

to give up your right to free speech. Captain Cline is not free to say anything but the official line.

As for the opportunities offered by the military, according to Ohio State researchers Mangum and Ball, who received funding from the military, only 12% of male veterans and 6% of female veterans surveyed made any use of skills learned in the military in their civilian jobs.

Captain Cline says that each of her recruiters is trained in ethical and legal issues before dealing with potential recruits. She omitted the fact that the Army is 40% behind in their recruitment quotas for 2005, resulting in extreme pressure on recruiters. As a consequence of 480 complaints received from January to May 2005 about improper conduct by recruiters, the Army called their first ever national stand down on May 20, 2005 to examine problems ranging from recruiter lies to the problem of recruiters being arrested for improper sexual contact with potential recruits, some of whom are minors. (One of the places this occurred was Gainesville.) Some recruiters are getting potential recruits fake diplomas as well as having them lie about some of their physical problems. All of this is a matter of record.

Captain Cline says, "When soldiers come home, they will still have a very good career with prospects for advancement, veterans' benefits, free medical care, free childcare. Where else can you get that?" In reality, if a soldier comes home and stays in the military, they will continue to receive free medical care. However, if they get out of the service and go to the V.A., the rules change. They only get 2 years of free medical if they have no service-connected conditions. In some cases, the V.A. charges a co-pay for medicine and medical services. The existence of free childcare is unknown to anyone at the

V.A. that I have spoken to. And in fact reservists are required to make arrangements for childcare prior to deployment, at their own expense.

I spoke with a recruiter while we were both in line at the post office. I told him I was a veteran and asked him if he told recruits about "Stop Loss" (a rule that allows the military to keep you even after you have completed your full 8 year obligation, known as an enlistment agreement, until the war has been over for 6 months). He looked at me, smiled and said, "I have a quota and I am not going to say anything that will have a negative impact on my ability to meet my quota."

I wonder if Captain Cline has her recruiters tell our kids that this administration has cut money for the V.A., or that their families and friends will have to raise money to buy flack jackets because the military does not have enough to go around, or that the Bush administration has cut the soldiers' combat pay as well as their overseas pay!

The military does what the politicians tell them to do. In Vietnam, we were exposed to Agent Orange; 40 years later American veterans and their families are still suffering from the effects of Agent Orange. We have many veterans suffering from Gulf War syndrome, which is believed to be linked to the drug concoction that they were forced to take even though the FDA did not approve it. We also have veterans suffering from the effects of depleted uranium that we use in our ammunition. If you believe the military is for you, be forewarned that you may be treated like a lab rat and exposed to chemicals or radiation that will hurt your family in later years.

The recruits are made promises by recruiters, but there are lots of problems.

The recruiting agreement says, "5b. Laws and regulations that govern

military personnel may change without notice to me. Such changes may affect my status, pay, allowances, benefits, and responsibilities as a member of the Armed Forces REGARDLESS of the provisions of this enlistment/reenlistment document." What this means is regardless of what a recruiter promises you and regardless of what training or assignment you think you are signing up for, the military will place you where they need you.

I had a case where a man enlisted based on a promise to go to nursing school.

His unit was redesignated as an MP unit; everyone in the unit was made an MP. They had 4 weeks of training and were sent to Iraq as MPs. One of the other local counselors on the local G.I. Rights Hotline had a case where a man was promised he would be a truck driver. After boot camp, he was told that his eyesight was too bad, that he did not qualify to be a truck driver and was being sent to the infantry. This is the kind of deceptive tactic used by the military to trick recruits out of their promises. Do you really believe that if a person's eyesight were too bad to drive a truck, it would be safe to give him a gun on the battlefield?

The overwhelming majority of those of us working on the G.I. Rights Hotline are veterans. We are not anti-military. As veterans, we have experienced the way that the military works. We provide assistance to those members of the military who feel that they are being taken advantage of, lied to or tricked. We believe that when the politicians are being irresponsible with the use and safety of our troops, the government loses in its argument that the military is a good career move. Presently, the politicians are being irresponsible with the troops and, as veterans, we feel that to feed our kids into this system without informed consent is a dereliction of duty. By informed consent, we mean

telling those kids the whole truth, not just the flashy stuff.

A good example of this is a common story used to enlist to reserve recruits.

They are told that they will serve one weekend a month, two weeks a year and still attend college. In reality, since reservists are being used as active duty soldiers, it is much more likely they will serve in Iraq or Afghanistan before completing any college. Many reservists have complained to the G.I. Rights Hotline about being called up and deployed and not being able to attend college. Some complain of being deployed in the middle of a semester, causing them to lose that semester's work. This is not uncommon.

The reality of educational opportunities is that service members must pay \$1200 in advance (\$100 per month for the first 12 months) in order to qualify for educational benefits. If the veteran decides after he gets out of the military that he wants to go to college but he did not pay the initial \$1,200, he cannot pay the \$1,200 and get benefits. Of those who have paid, only about 35% use those benefits and there is no refund of the \$1,200 for those who do not.

It would be great to join the National Guard or the Reserves and be able to help your community in cases of national emergency, but under our current administration, you would be off fighting a dubious war while your community sinks into hell with no relief. While you're in a place that you never needed to be, your family members could be dying on the streets. An example that remains etched in my memory is the woman I saw on Nightline who was dead in her wheelchair; her foot had been gnawed by a dog.

The military could have and should have been called on to help the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina, but they were not allowed to do anything for days because of a criminally negligent federal government that believes

the role of
government is to serve corporate interests, not the public.

In fact, it was reported that recruiters were working the Houston
Astrodome,
preying on evacuees who have been devastated by losing everything,
including
loved ones. I can hardly believe that the evacuees' frame of mind is
such that
they can competently make the potentially life or death decision of
whether or
not to join the military. And it is unconscionable that the very
government
directly responsible for the increased magnitude of their suffering
is so
callously offering the "help" of sending them to Iraq.

If it's really about "providing opportunities," then one should look
at the
alternatives to the military such as AmeriCorps where you wouldn't be
risking
your life, safety and future for a falsely conceived cause engineered
by, at
best, ignorant politicians who have never served in combat. see the
local Vets
for Peace website at <http://www.afn.org/~vetpeace/workshop.htm> for
more
alternatives.

It is quite interesting that conservatives are always arguing that
there
needs to informed consent for issues like a woman's right to choose
or balance for
issues like evolution in our high schools, but when it comes to the
military,
it's okay for them to operate in our high schools without balance and
recruit
our kids without informed consent.

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