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Officer programs thriving

Pay, changing attitudes draw recruits

By Frank Shaw
Of the Emerald

The black cloud hovering over the United States economy has a silver lining for military recruiters.

Capt. Donald Durden, a Marine Corps recruiting officer from Portland, estimates that interest in officer training programs has nearly doubled since 1979.

The Marine Corps is not accepting all applicants, Durden stressed, only the best.

"We're looking at the cream of the crop" he continued, "the upper percent physically and mentally."

Air Force Master Sgt. Gary Gunnels says applications for AFROTC have doubled in the year he has been working in the Northwest. He also stressed that the Air Force is only taking the top applicants.

Capt. Gary McCarty, a University ROTC instructor, thinks feelings about the military have changed.

"Attitudes have shifted," he says, "and there is no longer an antagonistic feeling towards the military."

Durden agrees, saying college students "see the military as a valid career and they feel that they are in fact serving their country."

The University ROTC program has increased from eight third-year students last year to almost 30 for the upcoming school year, McCarty says.

All the recruiters agree that the poor state of the economy is not the only reason for the increase in interest, but do think that it's a contributing factor.

Another reason may be the pay.

The starting salary for a second lieutenant in the military is about \$17,000 a year. Newly commissioned officers make \$1,056 a month in base pay, a \$279 housing allowance, a \$95 per month food allowance and

receive free medical and dental care, Durden says.

One reason for the increase in interest is that the people who are considering joining the programs were not directly exposed to the Vietnam War, and

The increase in the number of college students entering the military will help rather than hurt the civilian sector of the economy, the recruiters say.

"The average officer in the Marines spends only three years on active duty and then goes out and uses the leadership skills they have in the military to help them in the civilian sector," Durden says.

The military is providing a ready source of trained professionals for the use of the civilian industry, he continued.

The Army gets most of its officers from either the U.S. Military Academy at West Point or college ROTC programs, McCarty says. The Marines, however, receive most of their officers through other officer training programs.

The Marine Corps has three programs for commissioning officers, says Durden. They are the platoon leaders class, the officer candidates class and the military academies.

Each of these, he says, is designed for different people. The platoon leaders class is for freshman and sophomores in college, while the officer candidates class is for college seniors and graduates.

The Navy has two programs other than ROTC, Barton says. It has an aviation program called AVROC which guarantees candidates admission to

flight school, and a program for engineers that pays \$1,100 per month for the junior and senior year of school, with a \$3,000 bonus when the person joins.

The Air Force relies primarily on its ROTC programs and on the Air Force Academy for officers, but it does have a program for college students, says Gunnels.

"It's not a free ride," warns McCarty. "We put quality people in the service."



Photo by Mark Pynes

Thanks to a depressed economy and recent pay hikes, Uncle Sam is having much better success pointing out officer candidates.

see the military in a better light, Gunnels says.

"One of the keys to the success of the Navy and Marine programs," says Lt. Cmdr. Michael Barton, a Navy recruiter, is that both give the candidates the option to withdraw after they attend the first training session.

"Why would we want to officer someone who doesn't want to be in the service?" Barton asks.

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