

Military enlistment rising despite Persian Gulf war

By Don Peters
Emerald Associate Editor

Even with Desert Storm raging in Iraq, recruiting numbers continue to rise in all four branches of the armed services.

And most recruiters — both locally and nationally — aren't surprised.

"As far as recruiting goes, the more the general public sees about the Navy, the more they think about the Navy," said Senior Chief Petty Officer Steve Dougherty, public affairs officer for the Portland Navy Recruiting District.

Enlistment figures for the month of January were up in all but a few places. Gary Stoeffler, public affairs officer for the Portland Battalion Army Recruiting Headquarters, said the 82 Oregon recruits last month fell short of the 100-recruit goal.

"We've been real steady, but it slipped a little in January," Stoeffler said. "It's not real surprising. The kids are asking more questions and Mom and Dad are more apprehensive."

Stoeffler said enlistment goals for February were lower than in previous years because of federal budget constrictions.

"Before (Desert Storm) we were downsizing the Army," he said. "We knew these goals were going down anyway."

Oregon bucked the national trend for Army recruiting. According to a news release sent out by the United States Army Recruiting Command, Fort Sheridan Ill., the January enlistment goal of 5,630 was exceeded by 14 percent.

Air Force recruiting topped their January goal, getting 42 enlistments instead of the required 39, said Maj. Douglas Dotson, public affairs officer for the 3561st Recruiting Station at Sand Point Naval Station, Puget Sound, Wash.

"It was a normal month, nothing significant," Dotson said. "These numbers fluctuate up and down all the time."

Dotson said "delayed enlistment," in which recruits must wait anywhere from three months to a year to enroll in special training schools, keeps many

from backing out during times of international conflict.

Oregon helped the Air Force reach its January national enlistment goal of 2,556, which they exceeded by just one recruit.

The Marine Corps in Oregon also beat out its January mission of 25 by enlisting 28, said Capt. Jay Nelson, public affairs officer for the 12th Marine District Recruiting Station in Portland.

"The result was a little surprising in the sense that there didn't seem to be any break (in recruiting)," Nelson said. "The Marine Corps has no official stance, but personally, I don't think international events had any effect on recruiting."

Nationally, the Marine Corps had an enlistment goal of 2,117 in January, but compilations of all the recruiting districts in the United States will not be done until later this month.

Navy recruiting was up locally, too. Senior Chief Dougherty said no figures were kept for just the state of Oregon, but the Eugene recruiting station

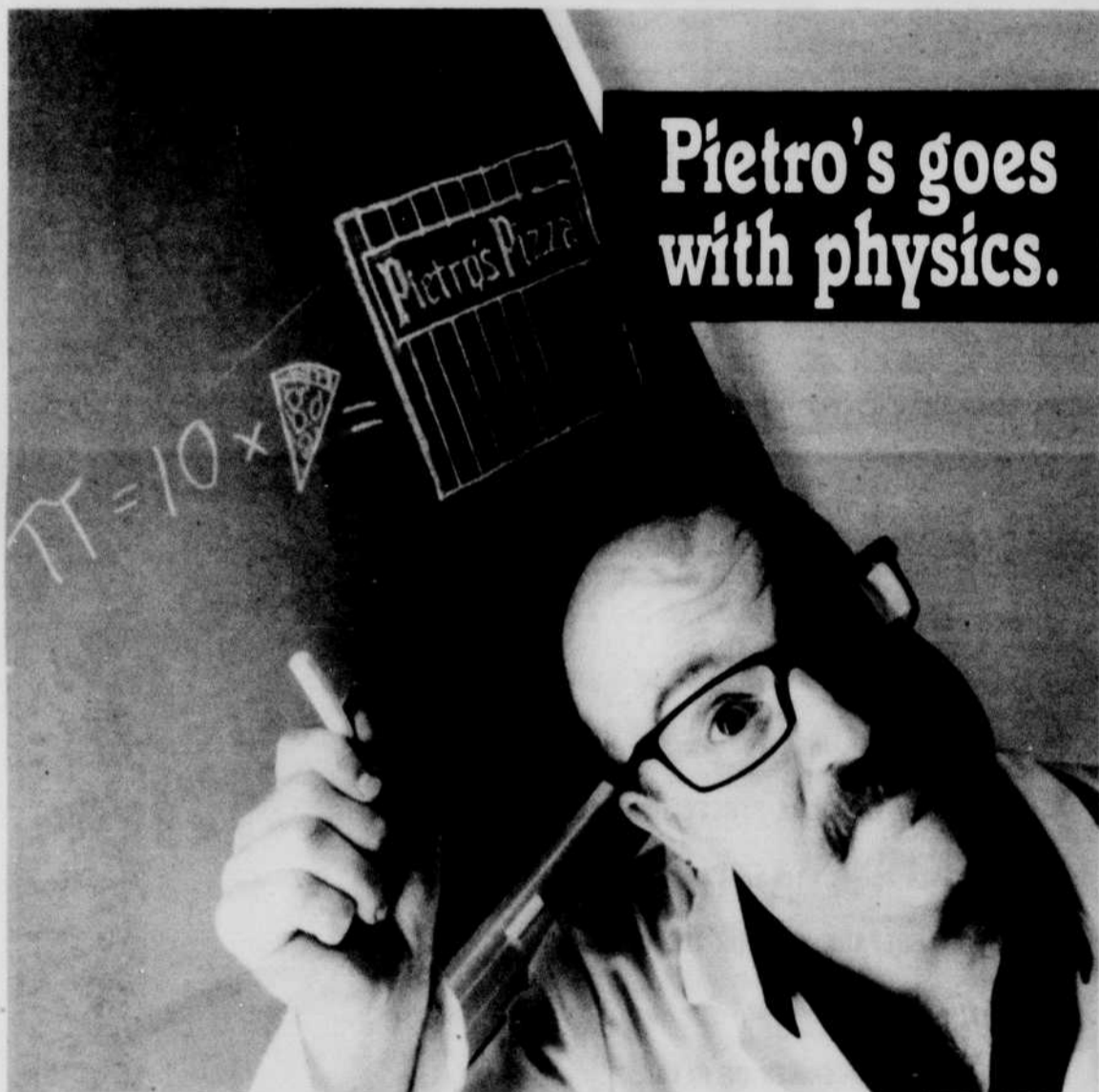
equaled its goal of 7, and the six-state Portland District nailed its goal of 144.

"Phone calls to the office have increased by a third," he said. "They're calls from people supporting the military, even if they don't like what's happening in the Persian Gulf."

Cmdr. Mel Sundin, public affairs officer for the Navy Recruiting Command, said national Navy enlistment figures are split into two categories: new contracts or "pool enlistments," and accessions, which are recruits actually sent to boot camp in January.

But as far as determining a national trend, it really doesn't make much difference. Both beat their goals: 5,316 new contracts as compared to a goal of 5,121, and 4,978 accessions compared to a goal of 4,928.

"We really can't tell if Desert Shield is affecting recruiting," Sundin said. "There are so many factors. In the Navy, we tend to be conservative and not make predictions."



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