

Army expelled 500 immigrant recruits in one year

By Martha Mendoza
and Garance Burke
The Associated Press

Over the course of 12 months, the U.S. Army discharged more than 500 immigrant enlistees who were recruited across the globe for their language or medical skills and promised a fast track to citizenship in exchange for their service, The Associated Press has found.

The decade-old Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest (MAVNI) recruiting program was put on hold in 2016 amid concerns that immigrant recruits were not being screened sufficiently. The Army began booting out those enlistees last year without explanation.

The AP has interviewed more than a dozen recruits from countries such as Pakistan, Iran, China, Mongolia, and Brazil, who all said they were devastated by their unexpected discharges or cancelled contracts.

Until now, it's been unclear how many were discharged and for what reason because the Army has refused to discuss specific cases. But the Army's own list, submitted to the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, says 502 service members who enlisted under MAVNI were discharged between July 2017 and July 2018.

The list, which was unsealed after a request from The AP, offers "refuse to enlist" as the reason for expelling two-thirds of the recruits. That is the reason given for 35 percent of enlistee discharges Army-wide, according to a research study posted on a Defense Department website.

But at least one recruit whose paperwork said he was being discharged from the program for that reason said it was not accurate.

Badamsereejid Gansukh, whose recruiter told him his Turkish language skills would be an asset to the military, said he didn't know he was discharged at all until he asked his congressman's office this summer to help him figure out why his security screening was taking so long.

"I never said I refuse to enlist, not at all,"



Gansukh said. In fact, he said, he had opted in for another year after getting a call from his recruiter.

Upon learning he was discharged, "I just broke down," the Minnesota State University graduate said.

The Defense Department said it would not comment on individual cases.

Twenty-two percent of the discharged immigrants were told their entry-level performance and conduct were subpar, which Pentagon spokeswoman Carla Gleason said could include being injured. Ten percent — or 48 service members — were listed as being discharged because of an unfavorable security screening. This can include having family members in another country — which is typical for immigrants — or the military not completing all of the screenings in a reasonable period.

There were three discharges for apathy or personal problems, two for having an encounter with police after enlisting, one due to pregnancy and another citing education, which could indicate a university opportunity.

Two "declined to ship" to boot camp, the list said, and two enlistees were discharged with the explanation "unknown," which the Defense Department said it could not explain.

The names of the service members and other personal information were redacted from the list to protect their privacy.

All the enlistees had committed to active duty or reserves; many had been regularly drilling and training with their recruiters in preparation for boot camp while awaiting security clearances.

If a recruit hasn't started active duty, the U.S. Army and Army National Guard have "the authority to separate the individual and terminate the contract, whether at the applicant's request or at the government's convenience," Army spokeswoman Jessica Maxwell said in a statement.

Margaret Stock, an immigration and national security law expert who helped create the MAVNI program, said the Army is not giving enlistees their legal right to appeal.

"They are trying to get rid of people," she said.

Eligible recruits are required to have legal status in the U.S., such as a student visa, before enlisting. More than 5,000 immigrants were recruited into the

ARMY EXPULSION. This November 2017 photo provided by Badamsereejid Gansukh shows him in front of a U.S. military recruiting office in New York's Times Square. Gansukh, whose recruiter told him his Turkish language skills would be an asset to the military, said he didn't know he was discharged until he asked his congressman's office to help him figure out why his security screening was taking so long. (Photo courtesy of Badamsereejid Gansukh)

program in 2016, and an estimated 10,000 are currently serving. The vast majority go into the Army, but some also go to the other military branches.

Gansukh, a first-generation immigrant from Mongolia, said he had hoped to be a part of something larger when he enlisted, and believed his service would be an honorable way to seek citizenship in his new country.

"Now I feel like I was really targeted in a way," he said. "I feel isolated from the rest of the people who are living here."

Other recruits discharged this year amid stalled security screenings were equally devastated.

"It's just like you're dropped from heaven to hell," Panshu Zhao said earlier this summer after learning he was getting kicked out. The Chinese immigrant is a Ph.D. student at Texas A&M.

As the cases snowballed, some began suing.

In response to the litigation, the Army stopped processing discharges and reinstated at least three dozen recruits who had been thrown out of the service.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis told reporters late last month that he supports the MAVNI program.

"We need and want every qualified patriot willing to serve and able to serve," Mattis said.

Mendoza and Burke reported from San Francisco.

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Paper company to invest in mills

PORTLAND, Maine (AP)

— A paper company says it's investing \$300 million into its Wisconsin and Maine mills over the next two years.

Hong Kong-based Nine Dragons Paper said in a press release that its U.S.-based subsidiary, ND Paper, will spend \$111 million at the Maine mills. Republican governor Paul LePage said it could spur 50 new jobs.

In June, ND Paper said it spent \$175 million to buy the Rumford, Maine and Biron, Wisconsin mills and an Ohio operations center from Catalyst Paper Corp.

The company says it'll construct a greenfield recycled pulp facility to add manufacturing capacity at the Maine site. Plans also include installing a shoe press to boost a paper machine's production capacity.

Nine Dragons Paper is China's largest producer of containerboard, commonly used in cardboard boxes.

TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA



■ Polo

Polo's "Talking Story" column will return soon.