## Benefits of Enlisting in the Armed Forces

Possibilities: Army, Navy (& SEALs), Airforce, Marines, Coast Guard,

As the costs of college continue to escalate, many high school graduates are considering enlistment in the military service as their “only hope to study beyond high school,” according to [Alternet](https://www.alternet.org/story/52233/the_making_of_an_american_soldier%3A_why_young_people_join_the_military). Enlisting in the military is also a way to do the following:

**1. Find Yourself**

Psychologist Jeffrey Arnett says that those between the ages of 18 and 29 are in a transitional period from adolescence and adulthood. The task of determining one’s identity and where they fit in society is daunting for many. Almost half of students entering college drop out before getting a degree and those who get degrees average more than four years of study.

**2. Serve Your Country**

Stanton Coerr states, “No one is in the military against his or her will. A veteran’s service in a war is significant not because we are special, but precisely because we aren’t. We volunteered, we went, we did what the nation asked.” Patriotism – love for one’s country – is a powerful incentive to join the military, and veterans are among those most respected by a thankful nation.

### 3. Receive Valuable Training in Different Fields

Each of the five branches of the military – Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard – offer training programs that enhance your career opportunities as a civilian. Career paths include arts and photography, news and media, aviation, engineering, healthcare, human resources and meteorology, as well as other fields.

During their service commitment, enlistees can receive college credits for their experience and training which are accepted by more than 2,300 colleges and universities. Soldiers can receive professional and technical training to meet licensing and credentials for civilian jobs such as electrical work or software engineering.

### 5. Travel Across the Country and Overseas

According to [Politico](http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/06/us-military-bases-around-the-world-119321), the various branches of the U.S. military maintain bases in 44 of the 50 states, and have more than 800 bases in 70 countries. Active-duty service members receive 30 days of paid vacation each year, in addition to two free days per week for most assignments, and can use their off-duty time to travel to other bases for rest and recreation if desired.

## An Armed Services Commitment

Today’s military enlistee is an 18-year-old (or older) man or woman in good physical shape who possesses a high school diploma or a GED. Also, each soldier has passed the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test with elements of arithmetic reasoning, word knowledge, paragraph comprehension, and mathematics knowledge.

### Service Commitment

All enlistees, regardless of service branch, commit to a minimum of eight years of service including active-duty and inactive reserves. Most enlistees should expect four years in each category, recognizing that an inactive reservist can be recalled to active duty at any time due to a national emergency.

**Basic Armed Service Benefits**

All members of the armed services are entitled to specific benefits during and after service, including:

* **Basic Pay**. Enlistees typically enter the service at the E-1 service grade with monthly pay of $1,566.90. The typical recruit advances to the E-4 level within three years of service earning $2.267.10 monthly according to the [basic pay rates](http://www.dfas.mil/militarymembers/payentitlements/military-pay-charts.html) effective January 1, 2016. Rates are automatically increased each year by a cost-of-living adjustment.
* **Special Pay**. Military members receive special and incentive pays based upon their assignment, location, or skills. This pay can include hazardous duty, the ability to [speak foreign languages](https://www.moneycrashers.com/learn-new-foreign-language-free/), or special duty assignments. In some cases, such as serving in a combat zone, basic pay and special payments are tax-exempt.
* **Free Room, Board, and Uniforms**. Enlisted members who are unmarried without children live on the base in barracks. When recruits share a single room, they receive extra pay, and soldiers who live off base receive a tax-free housing allowance. Also, all active-duty members receive a tax-free monthly food allowance that can be used for on-base meals in a base dining hall, as well as off-base. Finally, all recruits are given a complete set of uniforms during initial training. Thereafter, they receive a clothing allowance to replace items as they wear out.
* **Free Healthcare and Dental Care**. Active-duty members receive free care through a program called [Tricare Prime](http://www.tricare.mil/Plans/HealthPlans/Prime.aspx), usually provided through an assigned primary care provider or the base hospital. Also, veterans with more than two years of active service who have a service-related disability can qualify for lifetime [Veteran Administration benefits](https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book/Chapter_1_Health_Care_Benefits.asp).
* **Educational Benefits**. All military service members are eligible for [tuition assistance](http://www.military.com/education/money-for-school/tuition-assistance-ta-program-overview.html) while on active duty or in the Reserves. The assistance is not a loan, but is considered part of basic pay and can cover up to $4,500 in tuition and fees each year. Under the [Post-9/11 GI Bill](http://www.military.com/education/gi-bill/new-post-911-gi-bill-overview.html) or the [Montgomery GI Bill](http://www.military.com/education/gi-bill/active-duty-gi-bill-users-guide.html), service members and veterans can receive up to 36 months (four regular school years) of financial assistance for tuition, fees, books, supplies, and housing. Service members seeking to use the Montgomery Bill must contribute $100 per month for the first 12 months of active duty, but will receive $1,857 (plus an annual increase) for 36 months of school.