### About This Section

- There were a total of 1.3 million active duty U.S. military and more than 800,000 reserve forces as of September 2017, according to the most recent Defense Department personnel data.
- There are 18.8 million veterans living in the U.S., 7.6 percent of the population.

This is a look at our military today and where it’s going.

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<td>Military Working Dogs</td>
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<td>Medal of Honor</td>
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<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Military families today</td>
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</table>
• Active duty personnel: **321,444**
  • Officers: **62,361**
  • Enlisted: **259,083**

The Air Force has **12,297** pilots, **3,219** navigators and **1,219** air battle managers in the grade of lieutenant colonel and below.

The Air Force has **25,617** non-rated line officers in the grade of lieutenant colonel and below.

**Age**
- 35: Average age of the officer force
- 28: Average age for enlisted force
- 39 percent are younger than 26
- 45 percent of enlisted are younger than 26
- 13 percent of officers are younger than 26

**Gender**
- **65,390** of total personnel are women (20.3 percent)
- **21.2** percent of the officers are women
- **20.1** percent of enlisted corps are women
- **58 percent** of the female officers are line officers
- **42 percent** are non-line (line officers exercise general command authority and are eligible for operational command positions, as opposed to officers who normally exercise authority within a specialty)
- **85 percent** of the male officers are line officers
- **15 percent** are non-line
- **749 female pilots; 327 navigators; 229 air battle managers**

**Marital status**
- **54 percent** married, which is **69 percent** of the officers and **51 percent** of enlisted
- **28,479** active duty members married to another active duty member
- **1,625** married to members of other military services
- **140,574** active duty members married to non-military
- **141** active duty members married to Reserve/Guard other service
- **4,319** active duty married to Air Force Reserve Command/Air National Guard
- **146,306** active duty members are not married
- **379,206** family members are supported by active duty personnel
- **245,845** family members reside in an airman's household
- **20 percent** of the current force is assigned overseas (including Alaska and Hawaii), which includes 9,081 officers and 55,255 enlisted personnel

**Family members**
- **141** active duty members married to Reserve/Guard other service
- **4,319** active duty married to Air Force Reserve Command/Air National Guard
- **146,306** active duty members are not married

**Total active federal military service**
- 10 years for officers
- 8 years for enlisted

*Source: U.S. Air Force*
The Marine Corps is the youngest, most junior and least married of the four military services.

- **66 percent** of Marines are 25 or younger
- **25 percent** of Marines are not old enough to legally consume alcohol
- **40 percent** of Marines are Lance Corporal or below (other services are between 19 and 23 percent)
- **42 percent** of Marines are married (next closest is the Navy at 52 percent)

Marine Corps families are “younger” than those of the other military services.

- **29.3** is the average age of Marine spouses (next closest is Army at 31.5)
- **27.8** is the average age of a married enlisted Marine (average age is 30.7 years old for all other services)
- **24.2** is the average age of a Marine at birth of first child

**SERVICE TRENDS**

On average, active duty Marines served 5.1 years, and 64 percent of the total active duty force has served less than 4 years.

- **15 percent** four to six years
- **8 percent** seven to 10 years
- **6 percent** 11-14 years
- **5 percent** 15-19 years
- **2 percent** 20-plus years

Officer years of active duty:

- **24 percent** less than four years
- **15 percent** seven to 10 years
- **14 percent** four to six years
- **14 percent** 11-14 years
- **17 percent** 15-19 years
- **16 percent** 20-plus years

**15,875** Marines were deployed between January and June 2017. The Marines who were deployed had 14,152 dependent family members.

*Source: Marine Corps Total Force Data Warehouse, June 2017 (latest available)*
Total military personnel of the U.S. Army (2018)

- **General** (O10): 11
- **Lieutenant General** (O9): 45
- **Major General** (O8): 124
- **Brigadier General** (O7): 129
- **Colonel** (O6): 4,152
- **Lieutenant Colonel** (O5): 8,913
- **Major** (O4): 4,902
- **Captain** (O3): 28,870
- **1st Lieutenant** (O2): 12,587
- **2nd Lieutenant** (O1): 7,301
- **Warrant Officer** (W5): 592
- **Warrant Officer** (W4): 1,991
- **Warrant Officer** (W3): 4,105
- **Warrant Officer** (W2): 5,720
- **Warrant Officer** (W1): 1,967
- **Sergeant Major** (E9): 3,330
- **1st Sergeant/Master Sergeant** (E8): 10,830
- **Platoon Sergeant** (E7): 35,465
- **Staff Sergeant** (E6): 56,648
- **Sergeant** (E5): 70,335
- **Corporal/Specialist** (E4): 100,707
- **Private 1st Class** (E3): 50,386
- **Private-E2** (E2): 29,883
- **Private-E1** (E1): 50,578

Total officer personnel: 91,409
Total enlisted: 378,162
Cadets: 4,395
Total end strength: 473,966

*Source: Statista*
The Coast Guard is a unique branch of the military responsible for an array of maritime duties, from ensuring safe and lawful commerce to performing rescue missions in severe conditions. Nearly 42,000 men and women are actively serving in the Coast Guard.

Missions

- Port and waterway security including prevention and response to terrorist attacks.
- Drug interdiction and acting as the first line of defense against drug smugglers.
- Aids to navigation including the care and maintenance of maritime aids such as signs, symbols, buoys, markers, lighthouses and regulations.
- Search and rescue, which includes helping boaters in distress.
- Living marine resources including ensuring the protection of marine life and enforcing domestic and international fisheries laws.
- Marine safety including investigating maritime accidents, merchant vessels, offshore drilling units and marine facilities. Additionally, the Coast Guard is responsible for licensing mariners, documenting U.S. flagged vessels and implementing a variety of safety programs.
- Defense readiness including maritime intercept operations, deployed port operations/security and defense, peacetime engagement and environmental defense operations.
- Migrant interdiction including conducting patrols and coordinating with federal agencies and foreign countries to detain undocumented migrants at sea and prohibit entry via maritime routes to the United States and its territories.
- Marine environmental protection including ensuring the livelihood of endangered marine species and enforcing regulations to avert the introduction of invasive species into the maritime environment, stopping unauthorized ocean dumping and preventing oil and chemical spills.
- Ice operations including ice breaking operations in the Great Lakes and Northeast regions.
- Law enforcement including preventing illegal foreign fishing vessels from fishing in U.S. coastal waters and enforcing international agreements to suppress illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activity in international waters.

Source: uscg.mil
**Personnel**
- Active duty: 329,867
- Officers: 54,621

**Enlisted**
- Midshipmen: 4,435
- Ready Reserve: 100,495 as of December 2018
- Selected Reserves: 50,080
- Individual Ready Reserve: 42,415
- Navy Department civilian employees: 274,300

**SHIPS AND SUBMARINES**
- Deployable battle force ships: 288
- Deployed battle force across the fleet including forward deployed submarines: 90
- Deployed ships underway: 43 (15 percent of total)
- Ships underway for local ops/training: 47 (15 percent of total)

**Aircraft carriers underway**
- USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72): Atlantic
- USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74): Pacific

**Amphibious assault ships underway**
- USS Essex (LHD 2): 3rd Fleet
- USS Kearsarge (LHD 3): 5th Fleet
- USS Boxer (LHD 4): 3rd Fleet

*Source: U.S. Navy 2019*
As of September 2017 there were 1.3 million active duty military and more than 800,000 reserve forces in the U.S.

### Where They Serve: Active Duty Military

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<th>Navy</th>
<th>Marine Corps</th>
<th>Air Force</th>
<th>Coast Guard</th>
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Source: Defense Manpower Data Center (Sept. 30, 2017)
Total enlisted personnel for each military branch and Coast Guard
- Army 371,874
- Air Force 254,126
- Coast Guard 31,755
- Marine Corps 162,977
- Navy 264,554
- Total 1,085,286

Administrative
- Army 5,575
- Air Force 14,095
- Coast Guard 1,678
- Marine Corps 11,691
- Navy 18,244
- Total 51,283

Combat specialty
- Army 101,873
- Air Force 618
- Coast Guard 637
- Marine Corps 40,108
- Navy 8,265
- Total 151,501

Construction
- Army 15,050
- Air Force 5,203
- Coast Guard 0
- Marine Corps 16,673
- Navy 3,692
- Total 30,322

Electronic and electrical equipment repair
- Army 29,276
- Air Force 29,988
- Coast Guard 4,351
- Marine Corps 16,673
- Navy 48,921
- Total 129,209

Engineering, science and technical
- Army 41,620
- Air Force 50,708
- Coast Guard 1,232
- Marine Corps 26,994
- Navy 41,017
- Total 161,571

Health care
- Army 28,362
- Air Force 15,431
- Coast Guard 729
- Marine Corps 0
- Navy 23,843
- Total 68,365

Human resource development
- Army 15,424
- Air Force 7,800
- Coast Guard 1
- Marine Corps 2,330
- Navy 4,019
- Total 29,574

Machine operator and production
- Army 4,374
- Air Force 6,283
- Coast Guard 1,744
- Marine Corps 2,488
- Navy 8,404
- Total 23,293

Jobs within the military
Fighter pilots and infantrymen are more glorified positions in the U.S. military, but service members work in occupations that exist in the civilian workforce, too, such as doctors, plumbers, electrical engineers and firefighters. Active duty enlisted personnel by broad occupational group and branch of military, and Coast Guard, as of 2017:
Media and public affairs
• Army 6,016
• Air Force 7,039
• Coast Guard 140
• Marine Corps 2,432
• Navy 3,744
• Total 19,371

Protective service
• Army 21,010
• Air Force 33,951
• Coast Guard 2,610
• Marine Corps 6,035
• Navy 12,961
• Total 76,567

Support service
• Army 9,913
• Air Force 5,193
• Coast Guard 1,111
• Marine Corps 2,210
• Navy 8,356
• Total 26,783

Transportation and material handling
• Army 47,047
• Air Force 28,236
• Coast Guard 2,610
• Marine Corps 21,168
• Navy 33,522
• Total 142,198

Vehicle and machinery mechanic
• Army 43,725
• Air Force 43,290
• Coast Guard 5,523
• Marine Corps 21,168
• Navy 46,984
• Total 160,690

Non-occupation or unspecified coded personnel
• Army 2,609
• Air Force 6,291
• Coast Guard 1,568
• Marine Corps 1,509
• Navy 2,582
• Total 14,559

Active duty officer personnel by broad occupational group and branch of military, and Coast Guard (2017):

Total officer personnel for each military branch and Coast Guard
• Army 90,226
• Air Force 60,350
• Coast Guard 8,198
• Marine corps 20,946
• Navy 53,869
• Total 233,589

Executive, administrative and managerial
• Army 13,142
• Air Force 6,730
• Coast Guard 0
• Marine Corps 2,450
• Navy 6,908
• Total 29,230

Health care
• Army 11,281
• Air Force 8,841
• Coast Guard 0
• Marine Corps 0
• Navy 6,845
• Total 26,967

Human resource development

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics; U.S. Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center
Basic pay for military personnel is based on rank and time in service. Pay bands are the same for all branches.

Members of the military may receive additional pay based on job or qualifications. For example, they receive additional pay for foreign, hazardous, submarine or flight duty, or for being medical or dental officers. Retirement pay is generally available after 20 years of service.

The pay structure includes enlisted, warrant officers and officers levels. Pay grades for enlisted personnel range from E-1 to E-9. For warrant officers the range is W-1 to W-5. For officers the range is O-1 to O-10. Pay raises occur at two, three, four, six, eight, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18 and 20 years.

An enlisted service member with less than two years of experience at an E-1 level will earn $1,638.30 per month. A warrant officer with under two years of experience will earn $3,037.50 per month. An officer with under two years of experience will earn $3,107.70.

An enlisted service member at an E-9 level with over 20 years of experience will earn $6,068.70 a month. A warrant officer with over 20 years at an W-5 level will earn $7,614.60 per month. An officer with over 20 years at an O-10 level will earn $15,800.10 per month.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Average salary

- Army $57,000
- Air Force $59,000
- Coast Guard $67,000
- Marine Corps $48,000
- Navy $63,000

Source: Payscale.com

$716 billion: National Defense Budget, which is 3.1 percent of the gross domestic product

Source: Department of Defense 2017 Demographics Profile of the Military
Multinational forces march in formation after the conclusion of the official opening ceremony of Cobra Gold 2017, the largest Theater Security Cooperation exercise in the Indo-Asia-Pacific, in Sattahip, Thailand. [PHOTO BY PETTY OFFICER 2ND CLASS MARC CASTANEDA]
Department of Defense 2017 Demographics Profile of the Military*

*Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding

The overall total number of military personnel is almost 3.5 million, including:

- 1,294,520 active duty personnel
- 40,600 active duty Coast Guard members
- 1,057,082 Ready Reserve and Department of Homeland Security Coast Guard Reserve members
- 208,608 members of the Retired Reserve and 9,082 Standby Reserve
- 868,648 Department of Defense appropriated and non appropriated funds civilian personnel

Active duty and Ready Reserve personnel

- 19.7 percent (472,047): Army active duty
- 14.4 percent (345,153): Army National Guard
- 12.2 percent (291,054): Army Reserve
- 13.4 percent (319,492): Navy active duty
- 13.3 percent (318,480): Air Force active duty
- 7.7 percent (184,401): Marine Corps active duty
- 4.4 percent (104,419): Marine Corps Reserve
- 4.4 percent (105,670): Air National Guard
- 4.3 percent (103,660): Navy Reserve
- 4.1 percent (99,269): Air Force Reserve
- 1.7 percent (40,600): Coast Guard active duty

Active duty by service branch

The Army is the largest branch of the U.S. military with 36.5 percent (472,047) active duty personnel.
- 24.7 percent Navy (319,492 active duty personnel)
- 24.6 percent Air Force (318,480 active duty personnel)
- 14.2 percent Marines (184,401 active duty personnel)

In 2017 the military force was 8.7 percent smaller than it was in 2010, when there were 1,417,370 active duty members. From 2010 to 2017, the Army (16 percent), Marine Corps (9 percent), Air Force (3.4 percent) and Navy (1.1 percent) all experienced a decrease in the number of members.
Ratio of ranks
- 82.3 percent (1,065,234) are enlisted personnel
- 17.7 percent (229,286) are officers
  That’s 4.6 enlisted personnel for every one officer.

Gender
- 210,336 women comprise 16.2 percent of active duty personnel, while
  1,084,184 men comprise 83.8 percent. Compared to 2010, both the percentage of enlisted members and officers who are women increased (from 14.1 percent and 15.7 percent, respectively, in 2010 to 15.9 percent and 17.7 percent, respectively, in 2017).
  - 4.2 is the ratio of female enlisted members (169,850) to female officers (12,921)
  - 4.7 is the ratio of male enlisted members (895,384) to male officers (188,800)
  - Of the 229,286 active duty officers, 17.7 percent (40,486) are female and 82.3 percent (188,800) are male.

Percentage of active duty service members by gender and service branch
- Air Force: 19.8 percent female and 80.2 percent male
- Navy: 19.2 percent female and 80.8 percent male
- Army: 14.9 percent female and 85.1 percent male
- Marine Corps: 8.4 percent female and 91.6 percent male

Race/ethnicity of active duty members
The percentage who identify as a racial minority increased each year from 2010 to 2016 (from 31.4 percent of enlisted members and 22.7 percent of officers in 2010, to 33.2 percent of enlisted members and 23.0 percent of officers in 2016).
  From 2016 to 2017, the percentage of enlisted members who identify themselves as a racial minority decreased (from 33.2 percent to 33.0 percent) while the percentage of officers increased (from 23.0 percent to 23.3 percent).
To conform to the latest Office of Management and Budget directives, Hispanic is not considered a minority race designation. 15.5 percent of personnel identify as Hispanic or Latino ethnicity.
- 68.7 percent (889,600) of active duty members report themselves as white
  - 17.3 percent (223,481): Black or African American
  - 4.5 percent (58,135): Asian
  - 4.2 percent (54,009): Other/unknown
  - 3.1 percent (39,610): multiracial**
  - 1.2 percent (15,176): American Indian, Alaska native
  - 1.1 percent (14,509): Native Hawaiian, Other Pacific Islander
** The Army does not report multiracial.
In 2017 the military force was 8.7 percent smaller than it was in 2010, when there were 1,417,370 active duty members. From 2010 to 2017, the Army (16 percent), Marine Corps (9 percent), Air Force (3.4 percent) and Navy (1.1 percent) all experienced a decrease in the number of members.
Age
Over half (51.7 percent) of active duty enlisted personnel are 25 or younger, with the next largest age group being 26 to 30 years (20.8 percent), followed by 31 to 35 years (13.8 percent), 36 to 40 years (8.8 percent) and those 41 years or older (4.8 percent). Almost one quarter (24.3 percent) of officers are 41 or older, with the next largest age group being 26 to 30 years (22.7 percent), followed by 31 to 35 years (21.2 percent), 36 to 40 years (17.7 percent), and those 25 years or younger (14.2 percent).

Overall, the average age of the force is 28.3 years. The average age for enlisted personnel is 27 years, and the average age for officers is 34.5 years.

Education
Most enlisted members (80.6 percent) have a high school diploma and/or some college experience, while fewer have an associate’s degree (10.5 percent) or a bachelor’s degree or higher (8.3 percent). The majority (84.8 percent) of officers have a bachelor’s or higher degree. Compared to 2010, the percentage of total active duty members who have a bachelor’s and/or an advanced degree increased for enlisted personnel (from 4.8 percent in 2010 to 8.3 percent in 2017) and officers (from 82.7 percent in 2010, to 84.8 percent in 2017).

Marital status
Just over half (52.6 percent) of active duty military members are married, which is lower than the percentage that were married in 2010 (56.4 percent). In 2017, almost half (49.2 percent) of enlisted members and a majority (68.4 percent) of officers report themselves as married. Over half (54.0 percent) of males and nearly half (45.3 percent) of females are married. In addition, 6.6 percent of personnel are in dual military marriages. During the 2016 fiscal year, 3.5 percent of enlisted personnel and 1.7 percent of officers are estimated to have divorced.

Reserve and guard
The Ready Reserve comprises the Selected Reserve, the Individual Ready Reserve and the Inactive National Guard. Because Selected Reserve members train throughout the year and participate annually in active duty training exercises, this data focuses on Selected Reserve, unless otherwise specified.

Selected Reserve Force consists of 815,116 members in seven components: The Army National Guard (343,603) and Army Reserve (194,318) have the largest number of Selected Reserve members, followed by the Air National Guard (105,670), the Air Force Reserve (68,798), the Navy Reserve (57,824), the Marine Corps Reserve (38,682) and the Department of Homeland Security’s Coast Guard Reserve (6,221). The overall number of members in the Selected Reserve is lower in 2017 compared to 2010. The Selected Reserve force is 4.9 percent smaller than it was in 2010 (when there were 857,261 Selected Reserve members).
Gender: Selected Reserve

- **159,749** are women, which is 19.6 percent of the Selected Reserve force, while **655,367** men comprise 80.4 percent. The percentage of women in the Selected Reserve has increased since 2010 (from 17.8 percent of enlisted members and 18.2 percent of officers in 2010, to 19.6 percent of enlisted members and 19.4 percent of officers in 2017).

Race/ethnicity: Selected Reserve

About one quarter (26.1 percent or **213,024**) of Selected Reserve members identify as a racial minority (Black or African American, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Multi racial or Other/Unknown).

The overall racial minority representation in the Selected Reserve has increased in the past five years for both enlisted personnel (from 24.9 percent in 2010 to 27.3 percent in 2017) and for officers (from 18.9 percent in 2010 to 20.3 percent in 2017).

To conform to the latest Office of Management and Budget directives, Hispanic is not considered a minority race designation; 11.5 percent of Selected Reserve members identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino ethnicity.

Geographic location: Selected Reserve

The majority (98.9 percent or **806,045**) of the Selected Reserve is located throughout the United States and its territories.

The 10 states with the highest Selected Reserve populations are:
- **California** (57,031)
- **Texas** (54,628)
- **Florida** (36,772)
- **Pennsylvania** (31,112)
- **New York** (29,271)
- **Ohio** (28,267)
- **Georgia** (27,184)
- **Virginia** (26,747)
- **Illinois** (24,516)
- **North Carolina** (22,009)

Selective Reserve in these 10 states comprise 42.7 percent of the total Selected Reserve population in the United States.
Age: Selected Reserve

More than one-third (37.7 percent) of Selected Reserve enlisted members are 25 years or younger, with the next largest age group being 26 to 30 years (21.1 percent), followed by 31 to 35 years (15.5 percent), 41 years or older (15.3 percent) and those 36 to 40 years (10.4 percent).

Slightly less than half (42.6 percent) of Selected Reserve officers are 41 or older, with the next largest age group being 36 to 40 years (20 percent), followed by 31 to 35 years (19.3 percent), 26 to 30 years (12.7 percent) and those 25 years or younger (5.5 percent).

Overall, the average age of the Selected Reserve is 31.8 years. The average age for Selected Reserve enlisted personnel is 30.4 years, and the average age for Selected Reserve officers is 39.2 years.

Education: Selected Reserve

Most enlisted members (76.7 percent) have a high school diploma and/or some college experience or an associate’s degree (8.3 percent), and 11.7 percent of enlisted members have a bachelor’s degree or higher. The majority (87.8 percent) of Selected Reserve officers have a bachelor’s degree or higher.

Since 2010, the percentage of Selected Reserve members who have a bachelor’s and/or advanced degree has increased for both enlisted personnel (from 8.0 percent in 2010 to 11.7 percent in 2017) and officers (from 84.5 percent in 2010 to 87.8 percent in 2017).

Marital Status: Selected Reserve

Just under half (44.4 percent) of Selected Reserve members are married, compared to 48.2 percent who were married in 2010. In 2017, 39.7 percent of Selected Reserve enlisted personnel and 68.7 percent of Selected Reserve officers report themselves as married. About one-half (46.7 percent) of Selected Reserve males and one-third (35.0 percent) of Selected Reserve females are married.

In addition, 2.7 percent of the Selected Reserve report that they are in a dual military marriage. During the 2017 fiscal year, 2.6 percent of Selected Reserve enlisted personnel and 1.9 percent of Selected Reserve officers are estimated to have divorced.
Active duty population is located throughout the world with three primary areas assigned: United States and its territories (87.5 percent), East Asia (5.4 percent) and Europe (5.1 percent).

The states with the highest active duty military populations are:

- **California**: 127,720
- **Texas**: 116,810
- **North Carolina**: 97,025
- **Virginia**: 88,045
- **Georgia**: 63,448
- **Florida**: 53,559
- **Washington**: 45,793
- **South Carolina**: 37,304
- **Hawaii**: 35,796
- **Colorado**: 35,192

Active duty members in these 10 states comprise 67.4 percent of the personnel stationed in the United States.

— Department of Defense

### Largest U.S. military cities (2018)

#### 1. Hinesville, GA
- **Military members and families**: 49,692 (60.1 percent of population)
- **Largest military base**: Fort Stewart
- **Veterans**: 16,638 (20.1 percent of pop.)
- **Home to** Army’s 3rd Infantry Division

#### 2. Manhattan, KS
- **Military members and families**: 38,868 (40.1 percent of pop.)
- **Largest military base**: Fort Riley
- **Veterans**: 9,179 (9.5 percent of pop.)
- **Home to** Army’s 1st Infantry Division

#### 3. Fayetteville, NC
- **Military members and families**: 117,598 (30.9 percent of pop.)
- **Largest military base**: Fort Bragg
- **Veterans**: 66,401 (17.5 percent of pop.)
- **Home to** Army’s XVIII Airborne Corps and 82nd Airborne Division, as well as Army Special Operations Command and 3rd Special Forces Group

#### 4. Watertown-Fort Drum, NY
- **Military members and families**: 34,736 (30.5 percent of pop.)
- **Largest military base**: Fort Drum
- **Veterans**: 15,401 (13.5 percent of pop.)
- **Home to** Army’s 10th Mountain Division

#### 5. Clarksville, TN-KY
- **Military members and families**: 67,507 (23.9 percent of pop.)
- **Largest military base**: Fort Campbell
- **Veterans**: 45,693 (16.2 percent of pop.)
- **Home to** Army’s 101st Airborne Division, 5th Special Forces Group, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment and 52nd Ordnance Group

— 247wallst.com
Is the MILITARY RIGHT for your child?

By Melissa Erickson

With a family history of military service, Gordon Jones already knew he wanted to enlist when he graduated from high school, but his parents wanted him to go to college.

“So off I went,” said Jones, owner of San Antonio-based GI Jones Home Inspection.

“I did not enjoy it and was not challenged and left after my first year,” said Jones, who quickly changed course, enlisted and became a rifleman in the Marine Corps Infantry, earning a rank of sergeant and serving in Iraq (2009) and Afghanistan (2011).

Determining whether the military is the right choice for a son or daughter requires looking at a bigger picture. The military can be a meaningful, exciting and rewarding career, but it’s certainly not for everyone. Noble and patriotic, it also requires people to work well with others, to leave their family and hometown often to travel the world, and to accept that their job may be dangerous.

For Jones, the hesitation his parents — both retired colonels in the Air Force — expressed was because they wanted him to become an officer, which requires an advanced degree.

His sister is a commander in the Navy, and she followed in the footsteps of their grandfather, who held the same rank.

“I am the only person in my family to have enlisted since the first World War,” Jones said.

Before making the life-defining decision to join the military, think about if you are right for the military, said Alex Coker, former U.S. Army recruiter and infantryman who served for 10 years. Only about 1 percent of the U.S. population actually serves in the military, he said.

“You would be surprised at how hard it is to get in,” said Coker, who was the co-host of “Remote Survival” on the National Geographic Channel. “It takes a very specific person because of multiple reasons. Not only do you voluntarily have to want to serve, but you have to be qualified, physically fit enough and smart enough.”

Education included

Recruiting goals for the Army fell short by about 6,500 soldiers last year, according to the Department of Defense, while the Air Force, Marines and Navy hit their 2018 recruitment targets. Only about 30 percent of Americans ages 17 to 24 check the boxes of physical, educational and moral fitness to qualify to serve, according to Pentagon statistics.

With an eye toward the future, many young recruits feel the military is a great choice because of the tangible and intangible benefits it offers, including developing discipline, leadership and career skills, plus financial incentives such as medical and educational benefits. Add to that 30 vacation days a year and the opportunity to retire — with pay — after 20 years of active service.
While colleges offer academic credit for military training and service, many active duty personnel can also attend school online and receive tuition assistance, said Chief Petty Officer Nick Ameen, Coast Guard Recruiting Command.

“It’s a pretty simple process. For many people, joining the military is all about the long game. Serving now helps set you up for the future,” he said.

“One thing many don’t realize, when someone joins the Air Force, they are also enrolling in the Community College of the Air Force,” said Chief Master Sgt. Matt Macho, superintendent in the Air Force Recruiting Service Operations Division.

“They begin earning college credits as soon as they start basic military training. The Air Force prides itself on encouraging new airmen to continually seek out educational opportunities such as advanced training and traditional college-level courses.”

“Many people think if you choose the Army you are not choosing education. That’s simply not true,” said Sgt. 1st Class Robert Dodge, an Army recruiter.

“In the Army you can have a career, technical training and work on your degree all at the same time.

“There are many benefits and advantages to joining the military, but really it comes down to what is important to the individual who is interested in joining. For some it’s the education benefits so they don’t incur student loan debt; for others it is the adventure and the ability to make a difference in the world.”

What it takes

Rather than looking for people with specific skills, the branches of the military are looking for people who possess the willingness to learn, can act as team players and have the integrity to do the right thing.

“We have world-class training, so we can absolutely teach someone a skill or vocation,” Macho said. “Prior to someone entering the military they are given tests such as the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery) and AFWIN (a talent acquisition test known as the Air Force Work Interest Navigator) that would direct them to an aptitude area or guaranteed position which they would perform well in.”

Helping with the decision

If a family member expresses interest in the military, parents “should have an open mind and listen to what your son or daughter wants to do, regardless of your personal thoughts or perceptions of the military,” said Lt. Amy Midgett, Coast Guard public affairs officer.

Parental support can have a positive impact on a child’s decision, Macho said.

“Whether your child decides to serve or not, knowing he or she has your support is always important,” he said.
The biggest piece of advice is to be supportive, Cushman said. “There are a lot of preconceived ideas about enlisting in the military that are often incorrect; by keeping an open mind and asking questions, you’ll help your child through making a difficult and important decision,” he said.

In addition to being understanding and supportive of your child’s plans and goals, do your research on each of the military branches, but understand that not everything online is an accurate picture of military service, Dodge said. “A recruiter will always have access to the most current information,” he said. “We want to ensure young people have the opportunity to make an informed decision about their future,” Midgett said. “They should understand all of their options before deciding on the path they want to take. Sitting down with a recruiter can help clear up misperceptions and likely teach you some things you didn’t know about military service.”

**Many paths**

A variety of paths can lead a person to active duty or reserve service, Dodge said. Join by enlisting, attending an Officer Candidate School, Warrant Officer Candidate School or a military service academy (like West Point for the Army), or through the Reserve Officer Training Corps while attending college. “Each of these options has different requirements to qualify and carry different benefits,” he said. “It comes back to identifying the individual’s qualifications and goals. Our recruiters are very skilled at developing an active duty, Army Reserve and civilian-based plan to identify what will best meet their needs and wants and get them to their end-state goal.”

Enlisting, which can be done straight out of high school, allows people to be trained in a variety of career fields: highly technical fields, jobs as police and fire personnel, plumbers and welders, as well as unique jobs like special warfare with the Navy SEALs, said Lt. Cmdr. Jessica L. McNulty, spokeswoman for Navy Recruiting Command.

“For those that qualify, ROTC scholarships exist that can fully pay tuition and other fees. There are also programs to help students pay for advanced professional degrees.”


**Understand the options**

If a person is thinking about a military career, don’t be hesitant to reach out. “Recruiters are not trying to force people into service. We want soldiers who want to be part of our organization,” Dodge said. “Meeting with a recruiter is not a commitment to join. It is a commitment to understanding all the options available before making a decision about your future.”

“The military is a great opportunity to make a start in life. It not only offers career training but discipline,” McNulty said. “Opportunities for advancement or increased responsibility are strictly based on sustained excellent performance and never influenced by artificial barriers like age, race, gender, etc. Opportunities abound for those who choose to stay and make it a lasting career, but for those who choose not to make the military a career, they can show up at a job interview with a level and discipline far beyond what their peers learned outside the military.”
To join the military, applicants must meet age, education, aptitude, physical and character requirements. These requirements vary by branch of service and are for officers and enlisted members. Qualifications common to all branches:

- Minimum age of 17
- U.S. citizenship or permanent resident status
- Have a high school diploma or equivalent
- Never convicted of a felony
- Able to pass a medical exam
- Applicants who are 17 must have the consent of a parent or legal guardian
- Maximum age: 34 Army and Navy; 29 Marine Corps; 39 Air Force; 27 Coast Guard

All applicants must meet certain physical requirements for height, weight, vision and overall health. Officers must be U.S. citizens. Officers and some enlisted members must be able to obtain a security clearance. Candidates interested in becoming officers through training in the federal service academies must be unmarried and without dependents.

Service members are assigned an occupational specialty based on their aptitude, previous training and the needs of their branch of service. All members must sign a contract and commit to a minimum term of service.

A recruiter can help a prospective service member determine whether he or she qualifies for enlistment or as an officer. A recruiter can also explain the various enlistment options and describe the military occupational specialties. Women are eligible to enter all military specialties.

### Enlisted members

Prospective recruits who wish to enlist must take a placement exam called the Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery, which is used to determine an applicant’s suitability for military occupational specialties.

A recruiter can schedule applicants to take the Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery without any obligation to join the military. Many high schools offer the exam. The selection for a certain job specialty is based on the test results, the physical requirements for the job and the needs of the service.

Applicants who decide to join the military must pass the physical examination before signing an enlistment contract. The contract involves a number of enlistment options, such as the length of active-duty or reserve-duty time, the length and kind of job training and the amount of bonuses that may be earned, if any. Most active-duty programs have first-term enlistments of four years, although there are some two-, three- and six-year programs.

All branches of the Armed Services offer a delayed-entry program allowing candidates to postpone entry to active duty for up to one year after enlisting. High school students can enlist during their senior year and enter service after graduation. Others may delay entry because their desired job training is not immediately available or because they need time to arrange their personal affairs.

### Officers

To become an officer, candidates typically need to have at least a bachelor’s degree, be a U.S. citizen, pass a background check, and meet physical and age requirements. Candidates for officer positions do not need to take the Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery. Some achieve officer candidacy by completing a degree and training through the federal service academies (Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard and Merchant Marine) or through the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps programs offered at many colleges and universities.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

### The draft

The United States ended the draft in 1973 and transitioned to an all-volunteer force. At that time the U.S. military was composed of 2.2 million people. That number has fallen to 1.29 million, which is less than 0.5 percent of the U.S. population.

Source: Council on Foreign Relations
A BOND FOR LIFE

Military working dogs an integral part of saving lives
With a leash locked around his left wrist, Marine Corps dog handler Ron Aiello walked behind Stormy, a German shepherd trained to find danger in the dark. Chosen for one of the first patrols of the first Marine Scout Dog Patrol in Vietnam, Aiello listened and heard nothing. It was May 1966.

Suddenly the lead goes slack and Stormy stops. Aiello kneels down to check and a bullet from a sniper’s round whizzes above his head, which was fortunately lowered to ask Stormy, “What do you see, girl?”

“There was a sniper in a tree on our right flank. Stormy smelled it or heard it. If I hadn’t bent down to talk to her ... She saved my life,” said Aiello, president of the United States War Dog Association, a nonprofit dedicated to honoring and supporting military working dogs past and present.

The United States military has a long history of service animals, from the horses and mules used for transport since the founding of this country to the dolphins and sea lions that now help with demining and search-and-rescue missions. Animals have served in every American war, according to Military.com.

“Gung-ho to serve his country as a Marine — Aiello’s grandfather and uncle served as Marines in World War II and Korea — he enlisted in July 1964 and did basic training at Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, North Carolina. Months later he saw a notice on a bulletin board for a dog training school that said participants would be assigned to a restricted area.

“In late ’65 you knew that sooner or later you would end up in Vietnam, so I thought, what better way to go than with a dog by my side?” he said.

Aiello deployed with Stormy for 13 months in Vietnam, leading patrols in search of “snipers, explosives, booby traps, spongy pits in the ground,” he said. They led Marines on daytime search-and-destroy raids and nighttime ambushes.

“We would get them out there and get them back safely. Sometimes it got a little hairy,” Aiello said.

“A war dog is not a pet, it’s a partner.

“I would defer to what she told me,” said Aiello, who would examine the dog’s body language, the terrain and the feel of the wind. Combined that information could reveal “at 11 o’clock 3 yards away there’s enemy in the tree line,” Aiello said.
**About MWDs**

Military working dogs are both bred by the military and purchased, and all must pass rigorous tests that ensure they are healthy, motivated to work and not afraid of common environmental stimuli such as loud noises, said Air Force Capt. Tate Grogan, director of operations of the Department of Defense Military Working Dog School. There are stringent medical exams and behavioral testing.

Dogs can be male or female; they must be between 12 and 36 months old and in good health. Most are German shepherds, Belgian malinois and Dutch shepherds. Labrador retrievers, pointers and other sporting breeds are also used for specific needs, such as specialized search and mine detection.

They need to be strong, bold and confident, plus exhibit a strong social character that will enable the dog to work confidently in a variety of environments, from asset security on a military base to deployments in a volatile war zone.

They must have a strong and unwavering reward and hunt drive, which is necessary for detection work. A dog must have top-notch olfactory and searching abilities to effectively find explosives and improvised explosive devices.

“The dog must also possess the boldness and courage to stand up to a threat. He must show a willingness to defend itself and its handler and the desire to physically engage any person attempting to harm the dog team,” Grogan said.

If a dog possesses these traits and passes all aspects of testing, the dog is then purchased and enters a training course to become a military working dog.

A military working dog’s training takes about 120 days. Dogs start out doing detection training, either explosives or drugs, then transition to patrol training, where they learn how to interact with suspects.

“Once they have completed training, they are shipped to their first duty station. At their first duty station they will meet their first handler,” Grogan said.

At some military branches a dog is teamed with a handler for their entire career, while at other branches dogs are assigned to a particular base and change handlers every few years as military members depart for new duty stations, Grogan said.
Bill Schroeder’s war dog Bandit, whom he handled in Korea and never saw after he returned home. [PHOTOS COURTESY OF BILL SCHROEDER]

Certified medical service dog Honey for Vietnam veteran Michael Gaither of Chiefland, Florida. [US WAR DOGS ASSOCIATION SOUTHERN CHAPTER 2]
Now they can come home, too

Military working dogs — as they’re officially known — have been used since World War I, Aiello said. It’s thought about 4,900 were used in Vietnam, but records were not maintained well, so the confirmed number is 3,747.

“These dogs served and died with American soldiers, saving thousands of lives,” said Bill Schroeder, a sentry and patrol dog handler who served in the U.S. Army for three years and patrolled the Korean Demilitarized Zone from 1966 to 1967: “Bandit and I would walk the hillside and look for bad guys.”

As opposed to the steamy jungles of the Vietnam era, Schroeder and “Bandito” contended with subzero temperatures.

“Sometimes Bandit and I would sleep in the same sleeping bag to stay warm,” Schroeder said.

In his deployment, dog handlers were more like renegades.

“There were almost no rules for us. I spent more time with my dog than with regular guys. It was wonderful duty,” Schroeder said.

One special moment is Christmas Eve on top of Taebaek Mountain.

“There was a terrible blizzard. We took shelter in a rocky outcropping. It was just Bandit and me and a sky full of stars,” Schroeder said.

The bond between dog and handler is special. “It’s a bond to stay alive,” Schroeder said.

Which makes it a shame about what happened to so many military working dogs in the past, when they were most often viewed as military equipment rather than living beings, said Harris Done, director of two documentaries on military working dogs, “Always Faithful” and “War Dogs of the Pacific.”

Of the almost 5,000 dogs that were used in Vietnam only 204 exited. Most were euthanized; others were turned over to the South Vietnamese Army, Aiello said.

Both Aiello and Schroeder have heartbreaking stories of leaving their dogs behind when their deployments ended. Both searched to find what happened to the dogs. Schroeder even hired a private detective, but neither was reunited.

History changed in 2015 when President Barack Obama signed a bill that guarantees the return of all military working dogs to the United States after being used abroad, said Barbara Snow, executive director of the U.S. War Dogs Association’s Southern Chapter 2. In 2000 President Bill Clinton signed a bill that allowed military dogs to be adopted.

In 2016 Schroeder’s wife shared his story of never being reunited with Bandit with an Air Force representative.

“The way I see it, the United States government owes you a dog,” Schroeder remembers hearing. The family has since adopted two war dogs, which often require
special care and expensive veterinary attention.

“They suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome, same as soldiers. They live only a few years in retirement and deserve the time they have left to live with a family and have veterinary care,” Snow said.

**War’s effects**

One lucky dog who is receiving the care he needs is Carly, a German shepherd patrol and explosives detection dog handled by Air Force Master Sgt. Brian Williams in Afghanistan. The Air Force veteran of six deployments — including to Iraq, United Arab Emirates, Kurdistan and Bahrain — was severely injured when an improvised explosive device detonated while he was on patrol to clear a known Taliban compound. He lost his left leg above the knee and had other extensive injuries; Carly survived.

While the two had a pretty “fresh bond,” Williams knew something was off about Carly when he saw the dog afterward.

“He was never diagnosed with PTSD, but I feel like he has it. He was different (after the attack). He freaked out about stuff, loud noises, that never bothered him before,” Williams said.

Because Carly was only 6 and a $42,000 U.S. military asset, the dog stayed in Afghanistan to work, Williams said. The dog was teamed up with another handler for a few months, but it was not a good fit.

“He ended up being kennelled and not getting the TLC that he deserved,” said Williams, who inquired about adopting Carly as soon as he began his recovery. In addition to phone calls to higher-ups, Williams even met with then-Secretary of the Air Force Michael Donley. The adoption took place Aug. 28, 2013.

The two now have an unbreakable bond that is especially meaningful because they experienced a life-changing event together. Recovery was not easy, but Carly helped.

“He gives me something to focus on,” Williams said.
The two are now “attached at the hip,” with Williams occasionally bringing him into work at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas, where he is on active duty as a security forces instructor.

A dog’s first handler has the right to adopt the dog after retirement, followed by the next handler. If the dog is healthy and strong to work it can go to law enforcement. Only after that is the public able to adopt them through Mission K9 Rescue, a Texas chapter of the U.S. War Dog Association.

“There are strict guidelines and tests done to ensure that the dogs are safe to go to a home environment,” said Air Force Capt. Tate Grogan, director of operations of the Department of Defense Military Working Dog School.

**Dogs with jobs**

The Air Force manages all military working dogs, and they are procured and trained through the 341st Training Squadron, Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, which also conducts all military police dog initial and advanced handler training, Grogan said.

“Dogs are valuable military assets and incredible team members. Engineers have been trying to replicate the olfactory — sense of smell — capabilities of canines for years and have yet to be remotely successful,” Grogan said. “Dogs, on the other hand, have been and continue to save lives by detecting explosives. They are virtually irreplaceable for the foreseeable future.”

**Photos courtesy of Lackland Air Force Base:**

1. In the Military Working Dog Handler Course, an instructor holds an IV bag for a USAF senior airman during a first aid and combat trauma training class. The dog is a high-tech canine trauma simulator that breathes, bleeds and has a heartbeat to help students practice treating lifelike injuries in the event their military working dog suffers injuries.
2. A military member, part of the Military Working Dog Course, trains a new dog on obedience.
3. A decoy suspect wearing a training bite sleeve is bitten by a dog in training after he made hostile movements in a training scenario.
4. Two trainers encourage a dog to go up and over a stair obstacle.
5. A dog receives its reward, a Kong toy, after successfully completing a bite-training scenario.
6. A dog in training watches its trainer as he simulates being a handler searching a suspect. The dog watches guard to see if the decoy suspect makes any hostile moves towards its trainer.
Dogs do a wide variety of jobs in the military. Early on, military working dogs were used as an early warning system to detect humans, Grogan said.

“As time progressed and the U.S. military’s objectives changed, their role developed into what is known as a sentry dog. This role differs from their predecessors’ mere detection of humans by adding the ability to physically apprehend an intruder,” he said.

This role evolved into the patrol dog, which functions like a civilian police dog, then shifted to include substance detection, Grogan said.

The vast majority of military working dogs today are trained as dual-purpose patrol/detector dogs.

“The detection of explosive devices is by far the military working dogs’ greatest contribution. Their ability to detect explosives saves more lives than any other capability, by any other animal. When it comes to detection, dogs are typically trained to detect either explosives or drugs,” Grogan said.

**Countless lives saved**

It’s impossible to say how many lives military working dogs have saved because no large-scale statistics of this nature are kept, said Grogan. “These types of statistics are difficult to quantify since one of the most effective methods of canine employment is deterrence. There is no way to know how many acts were deterred by the employment of MWDs, and therefore no way to know how many lives were saved,” said Grogan.

In Vietnam 10,000 dog handlers were deployed, so the Army estimates that military working dogs saved 10,000 lives.

“They saved many, many more, though, because that doesn’t include the numbers of casualties that the dogs stopped from ever happening,” said Aiello.
Marine mammals may be the most unique animals the U.S. military employs. For over 50 years Navy dolphins and sea lions have helped protect men and women at sea.

“Navy dolphins and sea lions travel globally to help recover lost objects in the sea and to help with humanitarian demining missions. Housed in San Diego Bay, Navy dolphins and sea lions work alongside their human partners in the open ocean every day,” said Jim Fallin, public affairs officer of the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center San Diego. They serve under the Navy Expeditionary Combat Command’s Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group 1.

More people are familiar with security patrol dogs, which use their keen sense of smell to detect illegal drugs and explosives on land.

“Since 1959, the U.S. Navy has trained dolphins and sea lions as teammates for our sailors and Marines to help guard against similar threats underwater,” Fallin said. “In the early years of the program, more than a dozen different species of marine mammals, as well as sharks, rays, sea turtles and marine birds, were all investigated and considered for their sensory and physical capabilities.”

Today, the Navy cares for, trains and relies on two species: the bottlenose dolphin and the California sea lion. Both are known for their trainability and adaptability to a wide range of marine environments, Fallin said. The Navy has more than 80 dolphins and 50 sea lions.

“They have been deployed for operations and exercises in Korea, Vietnam, Lithuania, Canada, the mainland United States, Hawaii and Alaska, Kuwait, Norway, Denmark, Germany and Australia. The most recent operational deployments were to Bahrain, Iraq, New Caledonia, Montenegro and Croatia,” he said.

After the terrorist attacks on the USS Cole in 2000 and after 9/11, the Navy and the Marine Mammal Program responded.

“The successful and continuous employment of the Navy’s swimmer defense dolphins at home during Operation Noble Eagle in 2001-03 was followed immediately by the simultaneous deployment of multiple marine mammal systems to Iraq, Kuwait and Bahrain during Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom,” Fallin said.
In addition to military and civilian personnel, dolphins and sea lions traveled to the Northern Arabian Gulf and served on the front lines of the war on global terrorism. They played a small but key role in ensuring that the Iraqi ports of Umm Qasr and Az Zubayr were clear of mines and other potential hazards, allowing food and medical aid to reach the Iraqi people early in the conflict, Fallin said.

“Dolphins naturally possess the most sophisticated sonar known to science. Mines and other potentially dangerous objects on the ocean floor that are acoustically difficult to detect with electronic sonar, especially in coastal shallows or cluttered harbors, are easily found by the dolphins,” Fallin said.

Their excellent low-light vision and underwater directional hearing allow both dolphins and sea lions to detect and track undersea targets even in dark or murky waters.

“They can also make repeated dives hundreds of feet below the surface, without risk of decompression sickness or ‘the bends’ like human divers,” Fallin said. “Someday it will be possible to complete these missions with underwater drones, but for now technology is no match for the animals for their missions.”

Accompanied by human teammates, dolphins and sea lions detect, locate and mark mines so Navy divers can deal with them appropriately before they damage or sink military or civilian ships. They can also detect and mark enemy swimmers who pose a threat to people, vessels and harbor facilities, Fallin said.

While learning to report the presence of objects important to the Navy is relatively easy, being truly comfortable traveling to and working in unknown waters takes many years, Fallin said. Navy sea lions often serve on active duty into their mid- to late 20s, while Navy dolphins routinely serve into their 30s, with some remaining on active duty into their 40s or even 50s.

“Caring for and working with the Navy’s marine mammals has generated over 1,500 scientific publications in the open literature on their health, physiology, sensory systems and behavior. Teaming with trained animals in the open sea has allowed both Navy and visiting scientists to learn many things about marine mammals that we would not know otherwise,” Fallin said.

— By Melissa Erickson, More Content Now
By Melissa Erickson

The stories behind the military’s highest award

Their actions are the stuff of Hollywood movies. Medal of Honor recipients are men — and one woman — who one day in their lives went above and beyond the call of duty. When everything pointed to moving in the opposite direction, these are the people who ran toward danger to save others.

While they did not set out to be heroes, they are brave, courageous and humble. A Medal of Honor recipient is the first one who will say, “I was just doing my job.”

Established by President Abraham Lincoln on July 12, 1862, the Medal of Honor is the highest award for valor in action earned — never won — by someone who has “distinguished himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty.” A soldier must exhibit “personal bravery or self-sacrifice so conspicuous as to clearly distinguish the individual above his comrades and must have involved risk of life.”

Robert Patterson, vice president of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, was a fire team leader in the Army’s 17th Cavalry during an assault against a North Vietnamese Army battalion entrenched in a heavily fortified position in May 1968. Leading his squad, which was pinned down by heavy fire, Sgt. Patterson and two others moved forward under a hail of bullets and grenades to destroy two enemy bunkers. Continuous fire rained down from other bunkers. With complete disregard to his safety and ignoring his comrades’ warnings, Patterson ran into the bunker complex to assault and destroy it.

“I’m not a hero. I was a soldier who was put in a position to do something, and I did it,” said Patterson, who began his military career as an airborne infantryman but switched to the cavalry to serve with the 101st Airborne. Patterson wiped out five enemy bunkers with rifle fire and grenades, killing eight enemy soldiers and capturing seven weapons. His actions inspired his platoon to resume attack and penetrate the enemy’s defensive position.

“The two most common traits (of Medal of Honor recipients) are humility and patriotism,” said Patterson, who remembers almost nothing about the attack. One moment it was noon and he was leading a patrol in search of the enemy, “and the next thing I remember it’s 5 p.m. and I was laying in a 500-pound-bomb crater,” he said.
Speaking with others who have had similar experiences, Patterson feels the loss of memory may be a sort of self-preservation that kicks in. The reality to too much to contemplate.

An E-5 sergeant (the lowest rank of sergeant) and just 21 when he received the Medal of Honor, Patterson served for 26 years, including more than a decade as a drill sergeant at Fort Bliss, Texas. After retiring from the Army, Patterson worked for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Earning the Medal of Honor “changed my life completely,” said Patterson, a high school dropout from Fayetteville, North Carolina, who often speaks to youth extolling the benefits of a good education and a solid character.

That’s one thing the 72 living Medal of Honor recipients have in common, said Janine Stange, a frequent supporter of veteran causes who invites the public to thank recipients with letters of gratitude every Medal of Honor Day, March 25. Letters are delivered “mail call-style” at an annual gathering.

If they are able, Medal of Honor recipients share their stories about service and personal sacrifice.

“It’s so important for Americans to hear these stories. These men weren’t born the Incredible Hulk. They are human beings who put it all on the line,” Stange said. “You don’t win the Medal of Honor. You get it for what you gave. They wear it not for themselves but for those who they served with and those who they lost.”

Evolution

Before the creation of the Medal of Honor, other honors existed including the Fidelity Medallion, which was authorized by an act of the Second Continental Congress dated Nov. 3, 1780, and the Badge of Military Merit, which was created by Gen. George Washington in a field order dated Aug. 7, 1782, according to the Pritzker Military Museum & Library in Chicago. While the Fidelity Medallion is older it was awarded to only three militiamen from New York and was intended to be honor for military, not as an award for bravery or valor. Additionally, it was never issued after the American Revolution.

The Badge of Military Merit was to be issued to enlisted soldiers in the Continental Army who exhibited “not only instances of unusual gallantry in battle, but also extraordinary fidelity and essential service in any way,” according to the Pritzker museum. This badge was America’s first combat decoration.

Three men received this honor, and while it was not used again after the war’s end, the precedent for issuing gallantry awards to enlisted personnel had been established.

The Purple Heart is the successor of the Badge of Military Merit.

A Meritorious Service Citation Certificate was authorized by an act of Congress March 3, 1847, during the Mexican War, according to Pritzker. The certificate was to be issued “to any private soldier who had distinguished himself by gallantry performed in the presence of the enemy,” and 539 certificates were authorized during the war.

As the highest award for valor in action against an enemy force, the Medal of Honor was created in relation to the Civil War to recognize military service members, said Laura Jowdy, archivist and collections manager for the Congressional Medal of Honor Society in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. There have been 3,505 recipients and 19 double recipients.

Since World War II there have been 430 Medal of Honor decorations presented.

“You have to remember that the Civil War accounts for 1,523 of the awards, which is over 40 percent of the total number of awards,” Jowdy said. “After all, the Medal of Honor was the only award for gallantry in the U.S. military until the introduction of other awards in 1918.”

An extraordinary honor

Earning a Medal of Honor is extremely rare when you realize that more than 43 million men and women have served in the U.S. military, said Matt Albright, program director of the Center for American Values in Pueblo, Colorado, which honors the sacrifices of civilians and veterans and educates about the values of honor, integrity and patriotism.

Pueblo is the “Home of Heroes” and the birthplace of four Medal of Honor recipients. When placing the Medal of Honor around Raymond “Jerry” Murphy’s neck in 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower said, “What is it in the water out there in Pueblo, all you guys turn out to be heroes?”

That’s one of many unique things about the Medal of Honor. It’s the only military honor worn around the neck rather than pinned on, Albright said. Also, it’s not the “Congressional Medal of Honor,” Albright said. The medal is bestowed by the president of the United States “in the name of Congress.” Its official title is Medal of Honor.

While there have been 19 double recipients,
it’s no longer possible to receive two, Albright said. Restrictions have been tightened over the years, and other honors have been added such as the Distinguished Service Cross, Navy Cross, Air Force Cross, Silver Star and Bronze Star, which make it more rare to receive the Medal of Honor.

Currently there are three variations of the Medal of Honor for the Army, Navy and Air Force. Personnel from the Marine Corps and the Coast Guard can receive the Navy version.

Some amazing facts about the Medal of Honor shared by Jowdy:
- As of March 8, there are 72 living recipients. Their average age is 70; five of them are over 90.
- It is against federal law to buy or sell a Medal of Honor.
- With 19 double recipients there have been 3,522 medals awarded to 3,503 recipients.
- Only one woman has received it: Mary Walker, who served first as a volunteer and later as a paid nurse during the Civil War. She was captured and released through a prisoner exchange and had her medal rescinded, possibly because of her sex, in 1917. It was restored in 1977.
- Two sets of fathers and sons have received it: Theodore Roosevelt Sr. and Theodore Roosevelt Jr., and Arthur MacArthur and Douglas MacArthur.

**Distinguished service medals**

The Medal of Honor is the highest honor for military valor and bestows tremendous distinction on the wearer. While not required, military members of all ranks, even generals, are encouraged to salute Medal of Honor recipients, Albright said. Presidents Richard M. Nixon and Lyndon B. Johnson were both recorded saluting Medal of Honor recipients.

Other prestigious military decorations include:

- **The Distinguished Service Cross** is the second-highest military decoration that can be awarded to a member of the Army (and previously, the Army Air Forces). It is awarded for extraordinary heroism.

- **The Navy Cross** is the second-highest military decoration that may be awarded to a member of the Navy, Marine Corps and to members of the Coast Guard when operating under the authority of the Department of the Navy. It is awarded for extraordinary heroism.

- **The Air Force Cross** is the second-highest military decoration that may be awarded to a member of the Air Force. It is awarded for extraordinary heroism.

The Distinguished Service Cross, the Navy Cross and the Air Force Cross are equivalent. Actions that merit them must be of such a high degree that they are above those required for all other U.S. combat decorations but do not merit award of the Medal of Honor.

- **The Silver Star** is the third-highest military combat decoration that can be awarded to a member of the armed forces. It is awarded for gallantry in action. Actions that merit the Silver Star must be of such a high degree that they are above those required for all other combat decorations but do not merit award of the Medal of Honor or a Service Cross.

- **The Bronze Star** is awarded to any person who, while serving in any capacity with the Army, Navy, Marine Corps or Air Force, distinguished themselves by heroic, valorous or meritorious achievement or service not involving participation in aerial flight.

*Source: Department of Defense*
MacArthur. In addition, there are two sets of uncle and nephews and seven sets of brothers.

- Theodore Roosevelt is the only individual to serve as president and receive the Medal of Honor.
- There are 14 known cases where a Medal of Honor recipient saved the life of another Medal of Honor recipient.
- Medal of Honor recipients receive a monthly pension for life, honorary membership at officer and non-commissioned officer clubs, and a personal Medal of Honor flag. They can fly on military aircraft on a space-available basis, and their children can attend a military service academy regardless of quotas.

**I wanted ... to run**

The youngest Medal of Honor recipient was Willie Johnston, a drummer boy in the 3rd Vermont Infantry Regiment, who was 11 when recommended for the Medal of Honor and 13 when it was presented, said Medal of Honor recipient Allen J. Lynch. The medal is an extraordinary distinction, but all people from all races and walks of life have it in themselves to earn it, said Lynch, who 50 years ago this April was discharged from the Army. A year later he earned his distinction, which came during the two-week Battle of Tam Quan, near the village of My An in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. It is rated the 15th deadliest battle in the war.

For the better part of Dec. 15, 1967, he lay hidden in a ditch in no man’s land, only several feet from enemy troops, protecting and attempting to rescue two wounded comrades. He had opportunities to escape, but he did not. And, eventually, he got the men to safety and they all survived.

“Lord knows, I wanted to get out of that trench,” Lynch said. “I wanted with every fiber of my body to run. I wanted to leave the wounded and get back to friendly lines. But I didn’t.” What made him stay?

“As I’ve gotten older and more reflective, I feel we are the sum total of those people who have raised us. My parents, grandparents, family members, drill sergeants, my priest Father Naughton and others shaped the man I’d become, and when tested, as I was tested in that trench, those people came with me. My decisions and reactions reflected the collective values of those who raised, taught and trained me over the years,” Lynch said.


Both Patterson and Lynch, as well as other Medal of Honor recipients, say earning the medal is easy; wearing it is the hard part.

“In the heat of battle you do what you have to do. Afterward you have to live up to what the Medal of Honor stands for,” Lynch said.

One given day recipients did something extraordinary, Lynch and Patterson said. Some went on to lead extraordinary lives; others less so. The country is free, but only because of the sacrifices of men and women like these.
The changing face of MILITARY FAMILIES

By Rachael Riley
The Fayetteville (NC) Observer

Technology has transformed how military families stay in communication across the globe, from cellphones with FaceTime or Skype to the military’s own technology that allows a service member deployed overseas to see the birth of his child in the States.

Richelle Futch is a Marine veteran and has been an Army spouse for nearly the past decade, living eight years near Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state and relocating to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, in July 2018. She said her three daughters have been able to connect with their father through Facebook or FaceTime when he’s been on deployments.

“We would get on a pretty regular schedule, except when he was crossing the wire (going off base) and going out onto missions and then we know it would be anywhere from three to five days or something when we’d hear from him,” she said. “But it’s pretty easy. They just get one of those little throw-away phones that works for the country and we can text. We can call as long as we’re not adding stress to the service member amongst the mission with things that we can handle on our own.”

The role of the nation’s military families has evolved from the founding of the Continental Army in 1775 and even during the past 15-plus years as service members have fought the nation’s longest war since Vietnam:

- In 1942, the Dependents Allowance Act was passed by Congress that established monthly payments for wives and children.
- The Dependents Medical Care Act was passed in 1956.
- In 1968, the Army established the youth activities program.
- In 1981, the first family advocacy program was established; and in 1984, the Army Community and Family Support Center and Army Family Action Plan changed programming from a soldier focus to including the whole family.

Family support programs include child care, youth programs, schools, libraries, sports and athletics, and Family Readiness Groups and spouse employment programs.

“The culture sometimes is stubborn when you get around people who think, ‘They didn’t issue you a wife,’” Futch said of an older military saying. “Sometimes it’s breaking down some of that cultural stereotypical stuff that’s still lingering from the past, but we’ve come so far. It’s really an amazing relationship that the military has gone out of their way to include families and make sure that they’re important as well.”

Warrant Officer Casey Matullo of the 82nd Combat Aviation Brigade spends some time with his wife and his son in 2014 on Fort Bragg before he and his fellow soldiers from a medivac company deployed to Afghanistan for nine months. (FAYETTEVILLE (NC) OBSERVER FILE PHOTOS)
Changing families

The past few decades have been an evolution, from Vietnam to the Cold War era and post-9/11, said Joyce Wessel Raezer, executive director of the National Military Family Association who became a military spouse in the 1980s.

"Some things have remained remarkably the same, but other things have changed dramatically as we’ve gone from the Vietnam draftee era to the larger all-volunteer force," Raezer said.

For one, the demographics of the military forces have changed, from being the young, mostly single male draftee force to more married service members and service members with children, she said.

A focus on family and child programs within the military started in the mid-1970s, but really kicked in during the 1980s, with child-care as an example, Raezer said.

"Child care was kind of an afterthought in the initial post-Vietnam early all-volunteer-force days, because there was still a sense that if people were married, the spouses were staying at home," she said.

It was in 1989 when funds started to be allocated for child-care facilities and a quality of standards and training were instituted, she said.

The late 1980s and early 1990s is when Raezer said the military started to "beef up" support toward a military spouse’s employment.

Although Desert Storm was a short war, she said, military officials started realizing then that service members needed to remain focused on the mission, and that supporting their families would help retain that focus.

"A lot of spouses went home to mama during that time and took kids out of school ... because they didn’t have the robust support of family things on installations," Raezer said. "So that was kind of a wake-up call for the military."

It was at that time that recruiters realized to "recruit the service member," the military must "retain the family," she said.
Futch credits the Army’s Morale, Welfare and Recreation program and United Service Organizations for having “great service” to support military families.

“USO is such a great organization if you just tap into it,” Futch said. “They’re not calling every service-member and saying, ‘We have this program, I hope you show up for it,’ but if you go look at their website and you’re a little bit proactive, then it opens up to such amazing things.”

The USO has supported the military and families since 1941, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt united several service associations to boost military morale and support families before World War II. The USO has more than 200 centers and a presence on every continent.

Organizations have also been created to support military spouses, whose roles have changed from solely taking care of families to entering the workforce. Futch, who previously had a private mental health counseling practice in Washington state, said she’s found Military OneSource to be supportive of transferring her license to North Carolina. Military OneSource is a Department of Defense program that provides resources and support to regular Army, National Guard and service members at no cost.

The transfer of military spouses’ professional licenses to other states has been an initiative touted by Karen Pence, wife of Vice President Mike Pence. The 2018 National Defense Authorization Act requires the Department of Defense to reimburse service members for licensing and certification costs up to $500 incurred at each permanent change of station, she has said.

“It’s important to take care of the spouses and the children so that the service members can stay focused on their missions and remain ready to fight and protect our freedoms, and we’re working hard to improve employment opportunities,” Karen Pence said.
The Military Officers Association of America has also worked to ensure that licenses are portable across the nation, MOAA’s president, retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Dana Atkins, has said.

“That spouse can go right into the workforce without having to wait months and months and months to basically get a license,” Atkins said of the goal.

The National Military Family Association has also supported legislation in the National Defense Authorization Act to reimburse military spouses incurring license fees when moving from state to state.

It’s not only the spouses who are navigating different rules in different states, Raezer said. Children are faced with ensuring school credits aren’t lost, or whether one state’s civics class is able to transfer as another state’s government class credit.

Organizations like the Military Child Education Coalition are working toward transitioning educational matters from state to state, and the Department of Defense has set forth standards for how schools should support transitioning military students.

Raezer said an example would be a child who starts kindergarten in one state but may not be kindergarten age in another being allowed to continue kindergarten in the new state.

What life is like for spouses

Raezer said an area in which the military has lagged behind the rest of America has been in spouse employment. The perception in the military has slowly changed from one-income families to military spouses working, either because of financial need or because of wanting a career, she said.

“The military is starting to realize that a service member may not want to stay in, if their spouse can’t have that fulfilling career,” she said.
Another evolution is related to female service members balancing the responsibilities of being mothers and focusing on the mission, Raezer said.

At the same time, issues affecting young families — childcare availability, pediatric health care, support in parenting — are compounded with military deployments and frequent moves, she said.

Arron McIntyre has been a military spouse in North Carolina for 14 years.

Though her husband has spent most of his career at Fort Bragg, McIntyre has been through nine deployments.

“Military spouses have learned to be very independent, and at the same time we work hard to make sure that our spouses know that we care about them at all times and that we’re there for them,” she said. “The bonds are strong.”

McIntyre, who is a nurse, said one of the things she’s faced as a military spouse is balancing a career and childcare, while her husband is gone for 6 to 18 months.

“You still have your pets, your car maintenance and your spouse’s family and friends and providing them updates,” McIntyre said. “We recently had a good friend of my husband move, and since my husband’s deployed I had to say words on his behalf about how much we’re going to miss this guy. It tore my husband up that he couldn’t be there.”

The couple’s daughter, who is 6, is also adjusting when her father is home or away for deployments.

“We call his deployments ‘long work,’ so when he’s home and has to work late she sometimes associates that with thinking he’s going to deploy,” McIntyre said. “Now that she’s older I see the emotions are there, and she asks every day when he’s coming home and when she can talk to him. I know she misses him like crazy or the fishing and kayaking trips she has with him.”

Still, McIntyre has noticed change during the past 14 years. She remembered early in her marriage receiving a letter in the mail from her husband three weeks into his training and crying at the mailbox because she was so happy to read it.

Now her husband is able to connect to Wi-Fi and it usually takes a day or less for her to receive a response to a text message, and he’ll Skype about five to six times during his deployment.

“My daughter’s face just lights up. She sits there and stares and makes funny faces. It makes her day,” McIntyre said. “And he’s able to see our dogs or the state of our backyard right now and how much it needs to be mowed.”

“Military spouses have learned to be very independent, and at the same time we work hard to make sure that our spouses know that we care about them at all times and that we’re there for them. The bonds are strong.”

Arron McIntyre
New deployments, new issues

Since the increase of service members killed in action in support of the Global War on Terror that has been ongoing since the Sept. 1, 2001, attacks on American soil, organizations and nonprofits have rallied around supporting those families.

Although the Global War on Terror may not be as apparent, Raezer said families are still dealing with deployments and the stresses that come as their loved one goes to an area of conflict, or even deploying in support of border missions.

“That may not have been on the radar screen of those families, and now they’re dealing with family separation,” she said. “It doesn’t matter if a parent’s deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan or to Texas guarding the border, to the child they’re still missing basketball games, birthday parties and holidays.”

While her husband is away, McIntyre plugs in to the local community and activities on the military installation. She lives off post.

In the community she’s found a retreat known as Rick’s Place, which is a nonprofit named after Sgt. 1st Class Richard “Rick” Herrema, a 27-year-old U.S. Army Special Operations Command soldier from Michigan who was killed in Iraq in 2006.

The retreat is free for military families to relieve stress and reconnect through activities like an amateur ninja obstacle course – a draw for McIntyre. There’s also a kids’ obstacle course, volunteer work days to clean up the property and bonfires to fellowship with other military families.

“I value Rick’s Place for the ability to be outside and to interact with everybody that I get to meet that’s going through a lot of the same things (as a military family), but I’m also getting to meet other people from the community,” she said.

McIntyre also uses the military installation’s gyms for weight training and preparation to train for the obstacle course, along with running the trails on post.

And although service members who deployed during the mid-2000s may no longer be in the military, they may still be feeling the effects and may have gotten married after getting out of the military.

“So we can’t forget our veteran families, either,” Raezer said. “Sometimes we think of the service member or veteran in isolation, but the whole family continues to serve.”
“On Memorial Day, we remember those who paid the ultimate sacrifice to protect the freedoms that define us as a nation. May we never forget the courage and selflessness of these brave men and women.”