



SATURDAY, AUGUST 06, 2005

Recruitment Is Down; Reenlistment Up. Why?

by Michael in New York on [8/06/2005 11:39:00 AM](#)

Everyone knows recruitment is down dramatically despite lowered standards. High school dropout? No problem. Got a record? We'll deal with it. And it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out why. But reenlistment is holding steady and even exceeding expectations. That's a dramatic switch from Vietnam when reenlistment followed recruitment in a race to the bottom. Some on the far right argue that since reenlistment is up that the soldiers must know something we don't and that things are actually going much better than it appears in Iraq. See, Iraq isn't Vietnam.

Well, I didn't buy that but I have been puzzling over the reasons why reenlistment remains relatively strong. Then the rather obvious answer struck me: this is their job. These soldiers are lifers, devoted to a career in the military. Walking away from it is a dramatic and scary switch from a track in life that is laid out and clear -- the very thing that appeals to many of them about the military.

David M. Kennedy wrote an op-ed in the NYT on July 25 pointing out that for all intents and purposes, **our military is now composed of paid mercenaries**. He went to great pains to make clear this was not pejorative -- anymore than people who take on the dangerous and important tasks of policeman or fireman are somehow diminished by acknowledging that it's their job as well as a calling. (And everyone recognizes it's a calling other people don't hear because it is dangerous and demanding. That's why we respect them.) Kennedy was warning about the dangers of letting a very small group of people take most of the burden of war upon them. If we're at war, all our lives should be impacted. That's clearly not the case now and that makes war all the more tempting for our leaders and too easy for the rest of us to let the fighting recede into the background.

But back to reenlistment. In Vietnam and Korea and World War II, most of the people who were drafted did their stint and then went home. (In WW II, that was after victory, of course; Iraq's "victory" per Bush came ages ago.) They were schoolteachers and mechanics and lawyers and businessmen. Some of them presumably felt drawn to a life in the military they hadn't considered before, but most went back home and got on with their lives.

Iraq is the first drawn-out conflict in modern times for which no one has been officially drafted. The soldiers bravely fighting overseas are lifers devoted to this career. It is their job. It is their world. Not reenlisting would mean abandoning this and starting something new they may be ill-prepared to face. Is it any surprise they're reluctant to do so? Back in Vietnam and


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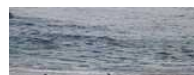


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Harry Shearer: Why The Birthers? - Okay, I admit it, it may be my fault, I've watched Chris Matthews for three straight nights, and each evening he's sent the same question...
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- Firedoglake**
Late Late Night FDL: Holiday Road - Lindsay Buckingham - Holiday Road. I'm not headed to Wallyworld but I am on the road tonight, headed down to the San Francisco Bay Area for the meetup this...
1 hour ago
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Open Thread and Diary Rescue - *Tonight's Rescue Rangers are noddem, Elise, jlms qkw, taylormattd, Shayera, and joyful with vcmvo2 editing.* The diaries up for rescue are: - *Vikin...
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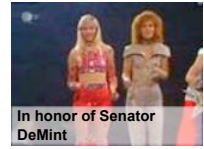
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