



Department of the Army Inspector General  
Special Inspection  
of the  
**New Soldier Experience**  
October 2021-September 2022



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# Executive Summary: Department of The Army Inspector General Special Inspection of the New Soldier Experience

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From October 2021 to September 2022, inspectors from the Department of the Army Inspector General, and 18 subject-matter experts from various commands and each component, assessed the Army's ability to transform civilian volunteers into professional Soldiers with common core values, ethical reasoning, motivation, and discipline through initial duty assignment in support of Army Readiness.

During this inspection, the inspection team visited 42 locations; interviewed and sensed 4,546 new Soldiers; surveyed 16,106 new Soldiers (E1-E4); and evaluated and observed programs, policies, and systems that serve new Soldiers at various stages of their first term (e.g., Military Entrance Processing Stations (MEPS), Initial Entry Training (IET) in-processing, and reception centers).

We found that the Army and its people are meeting or exceeding most new Soldier's initial expectations and successfully supporting them during their first term. At each transition, new Soldiers experienced engaged and genuine interactions with personnel (recruiters, drill sergeants, chaplains, unit leadership, etc.); however, they struggled when this did not occur, or when their experiences did not align with their expectations.

Initial expectations for the potential future Soldier began when they entered a recruiting station or met with a recruiter. Most recruiters successfully prepared their applicant for MEPS; however, those who did not negatively affected their applicant's transition. Of those applicants who experienced issues, most stated incomplete/missing documents delayed their enlistment or affected their pay.

Following MEPS (or Delayed Entry Program), the applicant transitioned to IET and became a trainee. During this in-processing, they were inundated with a multitude of briefings and information on support programs (e.g., Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP), Military Equal Opportunity (MEO), military resiliency training). However, we found that some trainees did not retain or fully understand these programs because of the magnitude of information received in a short time frame.

When they entered IET, most trainees indicated that genuine and engaged interactions with their drill sergeants, chaplains, and peers significantly influenced their overall training experience. Most stated their drill sergeants supported their personal and professional growth and created a positive command climate. However, some trainees remained hesitant to seek necessary medical/behavioral health care in this environment due to the fear of re-cycle, or their peers' and leaders' opinions about perceived inabilities related to seeking help.

Following graduation from IET, new Soldiers transitioned to in-processing at their first duty station. Most new Soldiers and their Families successfully arrived at their first unit

with proper, engaged support. Their sponsor contacted them prior to shipment, and they received their permanent change of station and travel orders without concern. Those who experienced challenges with sponsorship indicated they either did not receive a sponsor, or their sponsor did not provide engaged support during their transition. The Army's biggest success in terms of reception occurred at installations with appropriately resourced reception centers. These centers provided new Soldiers and their Families with dedicated support as they integrated into their unit.

During integration and throughout completion of the new Soldier's first term, their interactions with their first-line leader positively or negatively influenced their experiences and expectations. Effective development from their first-line leader came in the form of engaged and meaningful conversations. Ineffective development occurred when first-line leaders chose to engage in "cookie-cutter" counseling, which negatively affected the new Soldier's perception of his/her leader and the command climate. Additionally, contradictory expectations related to Military Occupational Specialties (MOS)-focused training (new Soldiers believed they would receive additional MOS training; first-line leaders expected them to be experts) compounded by daily taskings and competing requirements left some new Soldiers void of a purpose within the Army. This lack of day-to-day predictability and serving outside the scope of their MOS (e.g., S3U (Soldier Skills Set Utilization), BMM, troop diversion, etc.) influenced a new Soldier's desire to re-enlist past their first term.

In terms of SHARP/MEO, most new Soldiers were confident in their leadership's ability to properly handle SHARP/MEO incidents. However, some felt their leaders did not promote an environment that valued confidentiality or one that was free from retaliation. Additionally, new Soldiers either did not participate in, or know about programs that would enrich and enhance Soldier interactions and keep them connected (e.g., Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers, Soldier and Family Readiness Group, etc.). All new Soldiers who participated in the support programs acknowledged the benefit and expressed desire to partake in future events.

Aside from expecting engaged and supportive leadership, new Soldiers also believed the Army would provide them with comprehensive medical care for themselves and their dependents. While a majority of new Soldiers did not experience issues related to accessing quality medical care, access to specialty care remained an issue at remote installations.

In terms of housing, new Soldiers desired living conditions that supported their needs for safety, security, and privacy. We found that engaged leadership and active barracks managers contributed to satisfactory barracks spaces, while delayed work order requests, and outdated, non-existent common areas negatively affected new Soldiers' experiences. A majority of new Soldiers with dependents, living off-post, stated their low basic allowance for housing limited their ability to find safe and secure housing.

When we spoke with Soldiers about food options, most new Soldiers said they preferred basic allowance for subsistence over meal cards because it mitigated dining facility

inconveniences (e.g., location and operating hours), and allowed them to make their own food choices.

These collective experiences as previously described influenced the new Soldier's desire to re-enlist or transition out of the Army. Some new Soldiers expressed a desire to re-enlist because their collective experience with Army personnel, programs, and services further enhanced their perception of the Army and their vital role in shaping its future. Soldiers who expressed a desire to no longer serve were most concerned with counterproductive leadership, perceived better job opportunities/job satisfaction in the private sector, and a desire for MOS-based tasks.

**In conclusion, new Soldiers want engaged leaders, a cohesive and caring group of peers, safe and secure housing, pay that helps them care of their Family, and a career that enables them to be part of something greater than themselves. And, when the Army fails to meet those expectations, the chances of retaining a new Soldier and their Families significantly diminishes.**

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## New Soldier Experience

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Civilian volunteers join the Army with a myriad of expectations that are either self-imposed or influenced by recruiters, media, Family members who serve/served, and others. As they transition from applicant to recruit, recruit to trainee, and then to Soldier, those expectations evolve and either support their transition and success or act as barriers. Regardless, these collective experiences inform their final decision to re-enlist or leave the Army upon completion of their first term.

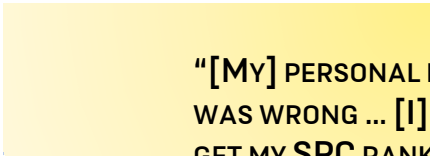
During our inspection we assessed the Army is meeting or exceeding most new Soldiers' initial expectations; additionally, personnel provided comprehensive support for new Soldiers and their Families during their first term. At each transition, new Soldiers experienced engaged and genuine interactions with personnel (recruiters, drill sergeants, chaplains, unit leadership, etc.); however, new Soldiers struggled when this did not occur, or when they felt no one cared. When these areas did not align, their initial expectations were not realized; they regretted their decision to enlist; and they lacked a desire to serve beyond their first duty assignment.

A potential future Soldier's initial expectations begin upon first interaction with a recruiter. From this point, the recruiter is responsible for ensuring their applicant arrives to the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) with all pertinent documents (e.g., marriage license, school transcripts/diploma, medical records, etc.) and information. The recruiter must paint a realistic portrait of the Army and the applicant's role in it (their military occupational specialty (MOS), responsibilities, environment, etc.) and prepare them to succeed in all areas. Most recruiters successfully met these responsibilities, thus allowing applicants to transition through MEPS without issues. However, recruiters who did not successfully prepare their applicants for MEPS caused applicants significant issues upon arrival at this entrance point. For some applicants, these issues continued to affect them in the training environment, and potentially led them to form unrealistic expectations related to their time in service. If the applicant arrived at MEPS without all required paperwork, and MEPS support personnel (guidance counselors, station commanders, designated representatives) did not identify and correct the errors, an applicant's enlistment was potentially delayed, their enlistment desire/current situations evolved and the Army lost a future Soldier, or a new Soldier risked leaving MEPS with unresolved errors (rank and pay related).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Army Recruiting Command Regulation 601-210 (Enlistment & Accessions Processing) outlines the processes to ensure complete and accurate enlistment records and applicant scheduled procedures; however, as indicated by several new Soldiers and re-affirmed by MEPS command teams, recruiters, guidance counselors, and or station commanders struggle with executing this process.

Applicants who experienced challenges noted issues with enlistment delays due to waiver requirements (medical), height/weight qualifications, and administrative errors/inconsistencies with relevant paperwork (i.e., contract discrepancies/incomplete packets). As discussed later in this report, these unresolved errors can negatively affect a new Soldier's pay, thus altering that applicant's initial belief that the Army would provide them with financial stability and the resources necessary to take care of their Family.



**"[My] PERSONAL INFORMATION WAS WRONG ... [I] ALSO DIDN'T GET MY SPC RANK THAT I WAS PROMISED FOR GRADUATING COLLEGE WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE."**

When we interviewed MEPs and Military Medical Command teams, all noted that improved medical/behavioral screening for applicants prior to MEPS would improve retention rates at IET. Additionally, an applicant's non-disclosure of prior medical/behavioral health only places them at risk for future issues when they enter IET/first duty station. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, 4,252 trainees were separated due to medical issues that existed prior to service, which accounted for 54.8 percent of the total IET discharges.

After taking the oath of enlistment, these new recruits transition to Initial Entry Training (IET) or enter the delayed entry program ((DEP) Future Soldier Program). While future Soldiers are in DEP, recruiters are required<sup>2</sup> to continue interacting with their recruits until they ship to IET. Similarly, recruits are encouraged to maintain communication with their recruiter. Personal stewardship of a recruit's journey provides a critical foundation of camaraderie and sets conditions for their future development. Those who entered DEP felt more Army training exercises and team building while in the program would prepare them for potential stressors related to IET. During our inspection we found the Army National Guard (ARNG) successfully manages their DEP recruits through the Recruitment Sustainment Program, thus supporting recruits' continued service. During this program, ARNG recruits attend "drills" at a unit close to their home prior to IET. While attendance is not mandatory, ARNG recruits are compensated and learn basic skills required to ensure success at IET. The program provides recruits with support,

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<sup>2</sup> UR 601-210 (Enlistment and Accessions Processing) Appendix O Future Soldier (FS) Management O-1. Purpose a. Outlines procedures to manage FS from the time of enlistment until the FS accesses onto AD or IADT. FSs are persons who have enlisted in the DEP or DTP and have not shipped. b. Provides guidance for FS initial orientation, management, and training. c. The Future Soldier Training Program (FSTP) is the primary introduction to the Army and provides the basic core knowledge required to prepare the FS for the rigors of Army life and keeps them qualified, committed, and eager to serve in the Army. d. The FSTP is a command responsibility at all levels. Key tasks for the chain of command include accountability, training, counseling, mentoring, retention and preparing the FS for training.



guidance, and skills, thus resulting in more ARNG Soldiers deciding to re-enlist, as supported by ARNG Attrition Management, 10 December 2021, which states, “ARNG first-term attrition losses have averaged 14,962 (11.9 percent of the first-term population) from FY12-21 and has been trending downward in nearly all major categories, resulting in more Soldiers reaching their initial re-enlistment decision.”

Following MEPS or DEP, a recruit begins in-processing at IET. Here the recruit becomes a trainee and enters a reception battalion. A trainee’s length of reception varies from 4-to-7 days and depends on their arrival time and training installation. As relayed by trainees, within the first 24 hours of arrival, they are inundated with a multitude of briefings on critical Army programs such as Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) and Military Equal Opportunity (MEO), and are educated on the Army values, and receive military resiliency training (MRT). We found that while they gain further education on these programs during IET, the timing of these briefings and overwhelming amount of information during in-processing meant some

**“RESILIENCY TRAINING SHOULD BE GIVEN AT EACH PHASE OF BASIC COMBAT TRAINING.” [...] “I’D LIKE MORE PRACTICAL TRAINING TO RE-ENFORCE THE SKILLS TAUGHT DURING MRT.”**

trainees did not embrace or understand the supportive elements of these programs. When asked specifically about resiliency (MRT), trainees struggled to remember details related to this training and key coping skills that could support them

during their first term.

Additionally, during in-processing, support personnel further establish a trainee’s military records (medical, financial, and personal). These records follow the trainees throughout their Army career, thus reaffirming the importance of support personnel executing proper quality assurance/quality control (QA/QC) on trainees’ records. Most active component trainees relayed a positive experience with reception, while some ARNG and USAR trainees experienced finance issues due to differences in components’ financial systems and a lack of effective and consistent communication with home units (liaisons). These issues caused delays in resolving military pay issues.<sup>3</sup>

Following in-processing, trainees transition to the IET environment where their expectations and understanding of the Army continue to evolve. The IET environment—which includes basic combat training, one station unit training, advanced individual

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<sup>3</sup> The Integrated Personnel and Pay System (IPPS-A), which launched in December 2022 and went live in January 2023, integrates all components personnel and pay functions together through MilPay. This integration allows basic combat training finance offices to access and resolve ARNG/USAR pay issues.

training (AIT), and any additional formal enlisted Army training—is an integral stage for trainees and reinforces the Army values, improves physical conditioning, and teaches combat and occupational skills. The majority of trainees stated their training environment strengthened their view of the Army and re-affirmed their decision to enlist. Specifically, trainees indicated genuine and engaged interactions with their assigned drill sergeants, chaplains, and peers significantly influenced their perception of the Army.

Most trainees indicated their drill sergeants positively shaped their environment, remained engaged and supportive, and developed and maintained a positive command climate and team-building mentality.

**"MY PERSONAL BCT DRILL SERGEANTS WERE INCREDIBLE; THEY HELPED ME INSTILL GREAT PRIDE IN WEARING THE UNITED STATES ARMY UNIFORM. THEY ALSO TAUGHT US DISCIPLINE AND TO ALWAYS SUPPORT YOUR BATTLE BUDDY."**

However, drill sergeants' misrepresentation related to the level of training received at IET (i.e., baseline

knowledge) left trainees with a series of false expectations when they entered the operational environment. Unfortunately, as described later in this report, when new Soldiers arrived at their first unit, they surmised that their first line leader believed they were already experts in their MOS, when what the new Soldier required/desired was further advanced training.

Regarding SHARP/MEO, trainees felt confident in their leadership's immediate actions on reported SHARP and MEO incidents, such as, the movement of a trainee who experienced an EO issue to another platoon at the request of the complainant. However, trainees wanted timely updates on reported incidents.

While at Fort Jackson, we spoke with trainees about the Soldiers against Sexual Harassment (SASH) pilot. This pilot identifies trainees as influencers who identify sexual harassment behaviors and provide instructions on how to intervene at the peer level. Most trainees felt the pilot met its intent and allowed them to exercise leadership skills, police themselves, and build character. However, some trainees indicated that SASH influencers were counterproductive and did not embody the values they were tasked to uphold.

Not only did a majority of trainees receive positive encouragement from their drill sergeants, but they also received unbiased support and wisdom from chaplains. The presence of chaplains at key training exercises, such as ranges and field events, provided trainees with a calming presence and re-affirmed their need for personal engagement during this time. They felt that chaplains' mentorship helped them cope

**"CHAPLAIN SUPPORT HELPED FOSTER A RELAXED CLIMATE AND CREATED A BETTER MINDSET TO CONTINUE TRAINING."**

with stressors induced by IET and enhanced their ability to succeed in a new and sometimes taxing environment.

Another vital aspect of training was peer-to-peer support. Most trainees confirmed their peers positively influenced their overall training experience. However, a dichotomy of experience remained between how males and females interacted in this environment. Women, and specifically those in combat arms, felt disrespected by their drill sergeants and male peers when serving in leadership roles. They experienced sexist and derogatory comments related to their physical abilities as women; however, they did not feel that a segregated training environment would solve the perceived disparities between the sexes.

In addition to personal interactions, perceived stigmas related to seeking medical care within the training environment also influenced a trainee's IET experience. Most felt the care received in this

environment met their basic needs; however, some reinforced the perception that seeking medical care would result in recycle or restart of that phase of

**"MAYBE IF TAKING CARE OF YOUR BODY WAS HIGHLIGHTED MORE AT BCT/AIT, IT WOULD RESOLVE SOME DISCOURAGEMENT OF SEEKING CARE."**

training. They perceived that requesting aid would also affect their drill sergeants' and peers' perception of their physical, mental, and emotional strength. Additional negative comments by their leadership regarding seeking medical care further supported their negative perceptions and made them hesitant to get help.

From our survey of 16,016 new Soldiers (E1-E4), we found that a trainee was 4 percent more likely to re-enlist if they were treated well after seeking medical care in the training environment.

Of note, the Army's recent implementation of TRADOC Organic Medical Structure (TOMS) into the training environment effectively triaged acute care and quickly returned trainees back to training. Key to this program is having medics and behavioral health specialists fully integrated into basic training units. During this inspection, we observed

that training installations with TOMS provided quick and efficient treatment for common medical conditions like musculoskeletal injuries or behavioral health issues.

As previously stated, unresolved administrative issues that began when trainees were recruits resulted in future financial issues. For most trainees, IET is their first experience away from home. Their financial responsibilities increase, and many are unsure how to navigate this new landscape. This is further compounded by the fact that they are unable to access their leave and earnings statement until the fourth or fifth week of the training environment; therefore, delaying resolution of any initial pay issues. Trainees confirmed this by noting that delays in receiving correct pay (Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) entitlements, dependent pay, etc.) took months to resolve. These pay issues were especially prevalent for USAR and ARNG trainees because of differences in pay systems. Often home stations/units must resolve a trainee's issues, causing further delays. Of note, IPPS-A, which launched in December 2022 and went live in January 2023, integrates 30 current Human Resources systems, eliminating 300 interfaces, and ensuring visibility of the entire force. This will reduce pay and personnel errors and provide Soldiers with full transparency of actions.

As discussed in previous paragraphs, support from drill sergeants, peers, chaplains, and medical personnel influenced a trainee's ability to succeed during IET. In addition to these personnel, trainees and Families agreed that communication was important and vital for the well-being of both parties. Families of trainees benefitted from the training unit's social media sites that provided trainee status and key information on milestones (e.g., graduation). Additionally, trainees' periodic access to cell phones allowed them to connect with their Families, while remaining focused on training.

Following graduation from AIT, new Soldiers transition to their first unit of assignment. When we talked to new Soldiers and their Families, the majority indicated they had no issues and received the crucial support they needed. A sponsor from their gaining unit contacted them prior to arriving at their first unit of assignment, and they received their permanent change of station and travel orders without issue. Of those who experienced issues, most were related to a lack of communication between IET and the new Soldier's gaining unit and inadequate/unengaged sponsorship/support. Some new Soldiers said they did not receive a sponsor and were instead, "left to figure things out on my own."

Without this engaged support, new Soldiers and their Families had to navigate this transition alone, which meant

they were unaware of their entitlements (e.g., BAH) or arrived at their first unit of assignment with incorrect records. Some regular Army (RA) Soldiers indicated they paid out-of-pocket for transportation to their first unit of assignment. For those with dependents, the unavailability of housing, and lack of an engaged sponsor/first-line

**"I RECEIVED MY ORDERS BUT NO ONE HAS HELPED ME [...] I FEEL LOST AND IT'S ALL COMING DOWN TO THE LAST MINUTE.**

leader led to increased financial burdens. New Soldiers with dependents were more at risk than single Soldiers, and some began their Army journey without financial stability.

We additionally found that some new Soldiers and their Families assigned outside the Continental United States indicated the lack of clarity regarding the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) requirements while at IET resulted in Family members being significantly delayed from joining them overseas. As a result of Army-wide concerns related to EFMP, in September 2022, the Army launched a new digital platform—Enterprise EFMP system—that makes enrollment, assignment coordination and Family support access easier and synchronizes all aspects for Families with special needs. The system's online forms cloud-save data, and case files automatically transfer with a Soldiers and their Families throughout their career.

Upon arrival to their first duty station, new Soldiers begin reception and integration into their installation/state/unit. Most new Soldiers confirmed they had no issues transitioning through the series of in-processing activities (e.g., personnel, finance, medical, housing, transportation (RA), central issue facility, and

orientation briefings). In addition to these activities, new Soldiers at Fort Drum participate in the Religious Support and in-processing (RSIP) pilot program, which integrates a spiritual wellness focus within each echelon over the span of a Soldier's 90 days at a new station. Results from this pilot are pending.

**"IT TOOK MONTHS TO RECEIVE HOUSING; MY BAH AND FINANCES WEREN'T CORRECT [...] MY FAMILY COULD NOT AFFORD A PLACE TO LIVE WHILE WE WAITED FOR HOUSING, AND I'M STILL WAITING TO RECEIVE THE BAH BACKPAY."**

Those who expressed concerns said a lack of information and disorganization, unresolved pay issues (e.g., BAH), and negative interactions with and disrespectful treatment from Civilians and the non-commissioned officer cadre negatively affected their transitional period. Additionally, SmartVoucher (reimbursement for travel expenses) training did not provide new Soldiers with clear instructions on how to submit their voucher, causing delays in resolution of returned documents related to improper input.

The Army's biggest success in terms of reception occurred at installations with dedicated leadership responsible for the oversight of new Soldier/Family in-processing. Additionally, appropriately resourced reception centers provided Soldiers and their Families with dedicated support as they integrated into their unit. At these installations, the cadre were hand selected, took pride in their duties, and provided trainees with exceptional support. This cadre was consistently improvising and improving the experience for newcomers to the installation. Some senior commanders highlighted the lack of resources for in-processing centers, adding that resources must be available to

affect noticeable change. Properly manned and resourced reception centers would help mitigate communication gaps and provide vital support to new Soldiers and their Families. At the time of the inspection, the reception centers were resourced by borrowed military manpower; however, RA Reception Companies began receiving manning resources in FY23. These funds continue through FY27. Additionally, Headquarters, Department of the Army Structure memorandum 2023-2027, 28 October 2020, approved the structure for 13 total reception companies with 214 military authorizations. These will vary in size and structure from large (23 personnel at Fort Hood, Fort Bragg, and Joint Base Lewis-McChord); medium (15 personnel at Fort Bliss, Fort Carson, Fort Campbell, Fort Riley, Fort Stewart, Fort Drum, Hawaii, Eighth Army, and USAREUR-AF); and small (10 personnel (Fort Benning)).<sup>4</sup>

Following in-processing, new Soldiers integrate into their unit and further interact and

**"[I] AM BEING PUSHED TOWARD SELF-DEVELOPMENT [..] I HAVE GREAT NCOs WHO ARE WILLING TO TEACH AND TRAIN AND ARE EASY TO COMMUNICATE WITH."**

engage with Army personnel, programs, and policies. During this stage, a new Soldier's first-line leader is a key component of integration; their knowledge of

processes, systems, and the Army institution contributes to the new Soldier's overall perception of the command climate and their development. Most new Soldiers stated their first-line leaders developed them professionally and personally. Effective development was the result of routine, informal, and engaged conversations between the first-line leader

and their new Soldier. Ineffective development occurred when leaders did not provide this one-on-one engagement; but instead, chose to only engage

**"TEAM LEADERS WRITE 12 COOKIE-CUTTER COUNSELING STATEMENTS AND FORCE [US] TO SIGN AND DATE THEM FOR THE MONTH THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO BE HELD [...] THEY ARE ONLY USED FOR NEGATIVE REASONS."**

during "cookie cutter"/"check-the-block" counseling. When surveyed, these interactions

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<sup>4</sup> Additionally of note, Sergeant Major of the Army's First Contact Program will improve reception of Soldiers into their unit. Three key tasks of this program include: establish division-level reception company Instagram account in accordance with first contact Instagram page layout; establish standardized QR code for Instagram account in accordance with QR code standard image; and provide information daily, in small pieces rather than PowerPoint/Letter or webpage.

negatively affected the relationship between the leader and new Soldier and influenced a new Soldier's perception of the command climate.

Additionally, while most Soldiers received additional MOS-based training, some new Soldiers in the operational force stated this did not occur. While sergeant's time training provided them with training, it focused mainly on tactical skills and building cohesive teams. Some also indicated a gap existed between the training and operational environments, and that their leadership's expectations related to their skillset contradicted the messaging from their drill sergeants. As previously reported, drill sergeants indicated to trainees they would receive further MOS-specific training at their first unit of assignment; however, some Soldiers noted this did not occur, and instead leadership expected them to be experts in their field when they arrived at their unit. These contradictory expectations, compounded by daily taskings, competing requirements, and limited training opportunities, took away from their sense of purpose in the Army. Additionally, when surveyed, we found that lack of day-to-day predictability and serving outside the scope of their MOS (e.g., S3U (Soldiers Skills Utilization), borrowed military manpower, troop diversion, etc.) was the second most common influence behind a new Soldier's decision to leave the Army after completion of first term. Per our survey of 16,016 new Soldiers, the top three reasons for a new Soldier to not want to serve past their first term included, (1) counterproductive leadership/poor-quality leadership issues, (2) lack of satisfaction in/desire to serve in their MOS, and (3) perceived better opportunities in the civilian market. USAR and ARNG Soldiers also expressed concerns with predictability that affected their civilian jobs and/or work-life balance. ARNG Soldiers specifically noted their training on active-duty systems and or processes while at IET did not correlate to individual state systems and processes, which left them untrained and ill-prepared when they returned to their home unit.

Like trainees, most new Soldiers were confident in their leadership's ability to properly handle SHARP/MEO incidents. However, a few new Soldiers expressed concerns with leaders maintaining confidential and

**"BEING IN A MALE-DOMINATED UNIT DISSUADES ME FROM HAVING CONFIDENCE IN REPORTING A SHARP/MEO ISSUE."**

retaliation-free environments. More specifically, females and minority ethnic groups expressed MEO concerns at a higher rate than their counterparts. These concerns made them feel disconnected from the unit and created challenges during integration. Additionally, new female Soldiers serving in combat arms continued to face challenges related to integrating into predominantly male units.

New Soldiers either did not participate in or know about programs that would enrich and enhance Soldiers' (and their Families') interactions and keep them connected (e.g., Army Community Services, Family Morale Welfare and Recreation, Better Opportunity for Single Soldiers, Soldier and Family Readiness Group, etc.). However, those new

Soldiers who did participate acknowledged the benefit and expressed desire to partake in future events.

Aside from expecting engaged and supportive leadership, new Soldiers also believe the Army will provide them with comprehensive medical care for themselves and their dependents. While a majority of new Soldiers did not experience issues related to accessing quality medical care, some new Soldiers—especially those at remote installations—experienced issues when seeking specialty care. New Soldiers at these locations had to travel off-post to get the care they needed, which took them away from their unit and potentially left them to incur additional out-of-pocket costs. We found that new Soldiers were unaware of the reimbursement opportunities that would help minimize out-of-pocket expense (i.e., DTS submission of local temporary duty voucher that can include actual expenses or monetary allowance in lieu of transportation (\$.22/mile) for care located more than 100 miles away from the installation). (Of note: delayed access to specialty care is a systemic issue that affects all Soldier and Families; regardless of rank or time in Service.)

In terms of housing, new Soldiers want living conditions that support their needs for safety, security, and privacy. We found that engaged leadership and active barracks managers contributed to satisfactory barracks spaces, while delayed work order requests and outdated, non-existent common areas negatively affected new Soldier's experiences. Additionally, new Soldiers remained concerned with key control in barracks rooms/misuse of keys by leaders, and a lack of control related to their barracks environment (e.g., temperature and lighting).

Currently, the Army has several ongoing initiatives related to these concerns and improvement of the barracks. U.S. Army Installation Management Command is currently addressing concerns from their November 2019 to September 2021 inspection of the Army Barracks Management Program. The summation of their findings is congruent with those found during our inspection, and include, work order management concerns, lack of funding and personnel to conduct maintenance, limited ability to QC the maintenance that was occurring, and key and access control issues/concerns. Another initiative includes the Barracks Leader Presence Tool/Leader Engagement Tool (LET), which promotes leader presence in the barracks. The LET pilot reduced barracks crime and harmful behaviors by 25 percent at Fort Bragg, NC. In addition to these initiatives, the Quality-of-Life task Force surveyed permanent party barracks residents at five installations: JBLM and Forts Bragg, Drum, Hood, and Wainwright. As a result of these continuous efforts, the Army will renovate or replace more than 1,200 barracks over a 10-year period.

A majority of new Soldiers with dependents, living off-post, stated their low BAH limited their ability to find safe and secure housing. The majority of these new Soldiers were living in areas with high crime, illegal drug use, gang-related activities, etc. Of note, the 2023 BAH increased to 12.1 percent. These new rates will cover roughly 95 percent of housing costs, including rent and utilities, in over 300 military housing areas.



In addition to expecting safe and secure barracks and affordable off-post housing, new Soldiers also expect the Army to provide them with convenient dining options. When asked, a majority of new Soldiers said they preferred basic allowance for subsistence (BAS) over meal cards because it mitigated dining facility (DFAC) inconveniences (e.g., location and operating hours), and allowed them to make their own food choices. We observed that even without BAS, new Soldiers consistently paid out-of-pocket to eat at alternate dining locations. Just as the Army has established several barracks-related initiatives, so too are they working on enhancing Soldier's food options/availability. Of note, Army Materiel Command, Project Management Office (PMO), Army Food Innovation and Transformation (Army-FIT) has developed a Warrior Restaurant Center (WRC) concept, a campus style dining initiative that they've executed at installations across the Army. The WRC program will directly impact readiness, recruitment, retention, and quality of life. Other initiatives include 16 food trucks and 11 kiosks in operation, meal prep programs available at 27 locations, and debit/credit card machines at 93 locations.

All these experiences and interactions with peers, leaders, and support personnel influenced a new Soldier's desire to re-enlist. Soldiers who expressed a desire to no longer serve were most concerned with counterproductive leadership, perceived better job opportunities/job

satisfaction in the private sector, and a desire for MOS-based tasks and training.

When surveyed, we repeatedly found that in addition to these

concerns and perceptions, new Soldiers wanted their leaders to treat them like adults. Additionally, at each stage of their first term they wanted to feel less like a number and more like an integral and important part of a team.

**"THE ARMY PROVIDES PEOPLE WITH THE MEANS TO BETTER THEMSELVES. PEOPLE CAN COME FROM NOTHING AND LEARN A SKILL TO PREPARE FOR LIFE OUTSIDE THE ARMY."**

**"WE WANT TO BE TREATED LIKE HUMAN BEINGS INSTEAD OF CATTLE BEING ROUNDED UP."**

Some new Soldiers expressed a desire to re-enlist because their collective experience with Army personnel, programs, and services further enhanced their perception of the Army and their vital role in shaping its future.

In conclusion, the new Soldier expects the Army to meet their initial perceptions. They want

engaged and respectful leaders (treated with dignity and respect); a cohesive and caring group of peers; safe and secure housing, quality training and dining options; pay that helps them take care of their Family (financial stability); and a career that enables them to be a part of something greater than themselves. And, when the Army fails to meet those expectations, the chances of retaining a new Soldier and their Families significantly diminishes.

## **Appendix A. Background and Methodology**

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In 2021, the Secretary of the Army directed the Department of the Army Inspector General (DAIG) to conduct an all-encompassing special inspection of the process of transforming civilian volunteers into professional Soldiers with basic common core values, ethical reasoning, motivation, and discipline through initial duty assignment in support of Army Readiness.

To accomplish this, from October 2021 to September 2022, we (including a total of 18 subject-matter experts from multiple Army commands and each component) visited 6 Military Entrance Processing Stations, conducted surveys at 7 Army installations, and sensed/interviewed new Soldiers at 29 Army locations from all Army components. At these sites we also spoke with leaders and examined all aspects of training, sponsorship, transition to permanent duty stations, command climate issues, quality of life, medical care, housing, and administrative matters. In total, we interviewed and sensed 4,546 new Soldiers, and surveyed 16,016 new Soldiers (E1-E4).

## Appendix B. Acronyms, Abbreviations, Initialisms

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ARNG	U.S. Army National Guard
BAH	Basic Allowance for Housing
BAS	Basic Allowance for Subsistence
COMPO	U.S. Army Component
DEP	Delayed Entry Program
DFAC	Dining facility
IET	Initial Entry Training
MEO	Military Equal Opportunity
MEPS	Military Entrance Processing Station
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
MRT	Military Resiliency Training
RSP	Recruit Sustainment Program (Army National Guard)
SHARP	Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention
USAR	U.S. Army Reserve

## Appendix C. Key Terms

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<b>Applicant for military service</b>	Per Title 10 U.S. Code, “a person who, under regulations prescribed by the Secretary concerned, is an applicant for original enlistment or appointment in the armed forces.”
<b>Army recruit</b>	Per U.S. Army Training Command (TRADOC) Regulation 350-6, “[i]ndividual who has joined the Army, who is under contract, in the delayed entry program (Future Soldiers Delayed Training Program, Recruit Sustainment Program, or similar programs).”
<b>Trainee</b>	Per TRADOC Regulation 350-6, “[a]ny military or civilian member undergoing initial military training in a formal training course with a unique training course identifier or attending an in-residence or non-residence training or education course (basic combat training (BCT), advanced individual training (AIT), or OSUT).”
<b>Delayed Entry Program (DEP)/Delayed Training Program/Recruit Sustainment Program</b>	Per U.S. Army Recruiting Command 601-201, “[u]nder these programs, an individual may enlist in a RC of the Army or other Military Service and specify a future reporting date for entry on active duty that would coincide with the availability of training spaces and personal plans, such as high school graduation.”
<b>First-termer (new Soldier)</b>	Per AR 601-280 (Army Retention Program), “[a] term used only within HQDA and DoD for statistical purposes to indicate a Soldier with 36 months or less of active Federal military service. This term is not the same and should not be interchanged with the term “initial termer.”
<b>Re-enlistments</b>	Per AR 601-280, “[a]ll voluntary enrollments after the initial enlistment or induction.”
<b>Retention and Reclassification Branch</b>	Per AR 601-280, “[s]erves as the coordinating agency to the Commander, HRC, responsible for the implementation and execution of DCS, G-1 policy pertaining to the Army Retention and Reclassification Programs while managing the daily retention operations Army wide.”

## Appendix D. Replicable Practices/Procedures

In addition to current Army/DOD initiatives, the following practices and procedures, as observed during our inspection, provide potential Army-wide solutions to new Soldiers' and Families' concerns during their first term.

PRACTICE/PROCEDURE	RELATED THEMES/NEW SOLDIER CONCERNS
Recruiter provides applicant with a realistic picture of their first term and shares Army opportunities past these 36 months.	expectation management, informed Soldier
Sponsors communicate with Soldier via FaceTime or similar application prior to new Soldier's arrival.	integration
Sponsors back brief company command teams on new Soldier and Family prior to their arrival to validate all information.	integration
Sponsors secure housing for new Soldiers serving OCONUS prior to new Soldier's arrival; reduces new Soldier's time in a transitional living space.	integration, engaged leadership, OCONUS assignment, housing
Company command team ensures sponsors inspect barracks for cleanliness and functionality prior to new Soldier's arrival	integration, engaged leadership, leadership accountability, housing (barracks).
Sponsor attends an on-post housing walk through with new Soldiers and their Families and is available during lease signing.	integration, engaged leadership, housing, Soldier/Family support, leadership accountability
Permanent party reception provides daily breakfast at reception center for all in-processing Soldiers thus promoting cohesion and building friendships/connections among all in-coming Soldiers.	Soldier bonding opportunities, reception/on-boarding

<p>Installation in-processing provides all incoming Soldiers with a checklist related to expected events during their first 30 days in their new unit (i.e., initial counseling, initial meeting with the unit chaplain, etc.).</p>	<p>reception/on-boarding, expectation management, predictability, informed Soldier</p>
<p>One drill sergeant per company serves as the subject-matter expert and QA/QC proponent on OCONUS permanent change of station processes and procedures. This practice ensures that each trainee has all pertinent information related to EFMP, passports, family travel, entitlements, etc., before they depart IET.</p>	<p>engaged leadership, record QA/QC, OCONUS assignment, Soldier/Family support, EFMP, informed Soldier</p>
<p>Command team sends a “welcome letter” email to new Soldiers on their gain roster, which creates a positive first impression while also gathering contact information.</p>	<p>engaged leadership, positive command climate</p>
<p>Company command team sends a letter to new Soldier’s parents explaining the unit’s mission and their daughter’s/son’s role in fulfilling this mission.</p>	<p>engaged leadership, positive command climate, Soldier/Family support</p>
<p>Garrison command team personally oversees handover of new Soldier to their unit after completion of in-processing.</p>	<p>engaged leadership, positive command climate, leadership accountability</p>
<p>Brigade command teams create new Soldier and new Spouse welcome packets focused specifically on the brigade and how to integrate into the community, thus promoting a positive command climate while keeping new Soldiers and their Family informed.</p>	<p>engaged leadership, Soldier/Family support, positive command climate, informed Soldier</p>

<p>Command team works with United Service Organization (USO) to provide new Soldiers with linens, shower curtains, and bathroom rugs as soon as move into the barracks.</p>	<p>engaged leadership, housing (barracks)</p>
<p>Green platoon”/ “Pegasus Troop”/ “Sabre Squadron” Reception Company: new Soldiers spend their first 8 days in the installation going through an orientation program. During those 8 days, Soldiers complete administrative actions, participate in Army Combat Fitness Test, a Leaders Reaction Course, and SHARP/EO Training. Soldiers also learn about the installation, off-post community, and the history of their unit.</p>	<p>engaged leadership, records QA/QC, positive command climate, informed Soldier</p>
<p>Brigade policy that every new Soldier participates in holistic health and fitness (H2F) within the first 90 days to establish a baseline of overall wellness and ways to improve if necessary.</p>	<p>engaged leadership, holistic fitness/wellness</p>
<p>Command teams actively promote and communicate—via social media, flyers, emails, etc.—MWR, BOSS, SFRG events and programs ensuring new Soldiers remain aware of opportunities.</p>	<p>engaged leadership, Soldier/Family support programs, informed Soldier</p>
<p>Command teams and BOSS representatives hold monthly meetings in the barracks for new Soldiers during duty hours so all can attend.</p>	<p>engaged leadership, informed Soldier, Soldier bonding opportunities</p>
<p>Battalion command teams mandate leaders engage in only face-to-face and hands-on training for new Soldiers (no PowerPoint-based briefings), which supports a positive command climate and re-enforces engaged leadership.</p>	<p>engaged leadership, effective training, positive command climate, Soldier development, informed Soldier</p>
<p>Command teams (brigade and battalion) hold new Soldier briefings (“new Soldier development talks”)/leader development programs each month at different locations on the installation (i.e., USO, Army community services, fitness centers, DFACs). Briefings include guidance on how to succeed as a new Soldier.</p>	<p>engaged leadership, informed Soldier, Soldier development</p>

Brigade command team authorizes an additional hour of PT each day for those who want it; delay their work call by an hour.	engaged leadership, holistic fitness/wellness
Brigade command team ensures education centers are open until 1900 hours once a week so new Soldiers can meet with education counselors.	engaged leadership
Battalion command team attends each new Soldier's first term re-enlistment.	engaged leadership, positive command climate
Chaplains engage with and provide fellowship for new Soldiers during critical IET training exercises.	chaplain support
Unit chaplains recognize all Soldiers' birthday and plan monthly birthday celebrations.	chaplain support, positive command climate
Chaplain-led strong bonds and financial peace programs support spiritual and mental well-being.	chaplain support, wellness
Medical care team proactively screens body movement of all new Soldiers to identify those "at risk" for injury and creates individual mobility exercise care plans.	engaged leadership, holistic fitness/wellness
Brigade command team institutes extended PT hours each Friday that focuses on H2F topics (0630-1030).	engaged leadership, holistic fitness/wellness
Military and Family Life Counseling (MFLCs), chaplains, and other support personnel provide coordinated and effective behavioral health care for all new Soldiers' behavioral health needs.	holistic fitness/wellness
Brigade command team co-locates brigade's chaplains and MFLCs.	engaged leadership, holistic fitness/wellness
Non-commissioned officer barracks manager gives Soldiers items provided by the USO to incentivize and educate them on the importance of submitting timely work orders.	housing (barracks)
Battalion command policy that all new Soldiers receive their first counseling within the first 30 days of being in the unit. This counseling focuses on any outstanding issues from IET and in-processing, ensuring new Soldiers and their Families succeed at their first unit.	engaged leadership, record QA/QC, Soldier/Family support,



	positive command climate, Soldier development
Company-level unit combines SFRG and BOSS events to increase participation and awareness, focusing on new Soldiers.	Soldier bonding opportunities, Soldier/Family support programs
Company command team holds a weapons safety class for all new Soldiers within 30 days after arrival.	engaged leadership, informed Soldier, Soldier development
Brigade command team holds lunches at the DFAC with new Soldiers in the brigade; battalion command team does the same at a different time.	engaged leadership, positive command climate
Garrison command sergeant major and installation command sergeant major have direct oversight of the BOSS program.	engaged leadership
Company command team provides a 3-day pass for a new Soldier that participates in a BOSS event within 45 days of their arrival.	engaged leadership, Soldier bonding opportunities
Spouses of a battalion command team reach out to new Soldier spouses to personally invite them to SFRG events.	Soldier/Family support
Battalion Command Team partners with Air National Guard to provide training to specialists and below on common topics for that age group (suicide, SHARP, financial readiness, etc.).	engaged leadership
Battalion command team ensures newly arrived Soldiers are aware of assistance programs (financial planning, education support, medical assistance).	engaged leadership, informed Soldier
Recruiting command team partners with MEPS and jointly provides QA/QC prior to an applicant shipping to IET.	engaged leadership, record QA/QC
RSP NCOs coordinate with cadre at IET location of new Soldiers to maintain routine contact with the new Soldier throughout IET	engaged leadership



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