



NORTH STAR PATHWAYS

Helping Students Pursue a Career in the Armed Forces

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Test Driving the Military in High School

Many high schoolers are interested in joining the U.S. military but naturally have never served before. Sometimes students will ask recruiters, “Is there a way I could ‘test drive’ being in the military?” While the military does not offer recruits the ability to “test drive” what it will be like (you will be signing a contract you will have to honor for a number of years), there are many organizations that you can be a member of in high school and get a feel for military life. These range from officially government sponsored organizations like the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) or private organizations like the United States Naval Sea Cadets or the Young Marines.

Not only do these organizations offer students a way to learn more about what it is like to serve in the military but also offer numerous other benefits.

Is the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps Program Right For You?

The JROTC was established by the government in 1916 in order to help students learn more about the U.S. military, promote fitness, and instill patriotism. Each of the six branches operate their own JROTC program through the American high school system. The U.S. Army and Air Force have the most JROTC chapters available students.

In high school, as a member of your JROTC, some periods will be administered through your JROTC company, which is usually led by retired service members from the relevant military branch, though sometimes it can be led by an active duty service member. JROTC programs regardless of branch affiliation will provide many different activities like military drill, physical fitness, firearm marksmanship and related military activities such as trips to military bases. Additionally they may offer courses in military science or military history. Like military personnel, JROTC members will have a uniform, practice military discipline, have ranks that they can progress through and military-style awards, while not actually serving.

Beyond informing you about military life and giving you a military network to assist you with a future career in the military, JROTC can offer a number of different benefits, such as:

- ◆ Physical fitness: JROTC members are regularly required to pass military-style physical fitness tests.
- ◆ Educational benefits: being in the JROTC can significantly increase your chance of graduating high school and can help you pay for college. There are many schools that will offer JROTC members up to \$6,000 in scholarships. Also if you want to commit to join the military either through a college ROTC program or through a U.S. military academy, being in the JROTC can be a great way to help get accepted.
- ◆ Confidence and leadership: Retired Navy Capt. James Boyer, senior naval science officer and former JROTC instructor explains that being in the JROTC can help foster a sense of leadership in students by giving back, “There are so



many things we do with community service. There are leadership roles.”

- ◆ Promotion: For JROTC members who graduate to a certain level, they can be fast tracked for promotion if they do end up joining the military.

Are There Private Organizations Right For You?

If your local high school doesn’t offer JROTC, there may be private organizations in your area that still may offer a similar program. While there are many different local organizations, there are three major national organizations that partner with military branches to help offer a military education to high school students; the Civil

Air Patrol, the United States Naval Sea Cadet Corps, and the Young Marines.

They offer, to varying degrees, a similar program of training, extracurricular activities, travel and education. They are organized into units, often partnering with a local military base, and lead by volunteers, often former or active duty military personnel. The level to which they partner with the relevant military branch will also vary. While the Civil Air Patrol is the official civilian auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force and the USNSCC was chartered at the request of the Department of the Navy, the Young Marines were started by the Marine Corps League, an organization for Marine veterans.

Like a JROTC program, being a member of any of these organizations can be immensely beneficial by helping you maintain physical fitness, find friends, serve your community and even advance your career and education. For instance, rising through the ranks in the USNSCC can help get you promoted faster if you end up joining the Navy, Coast Guard, or Marine Corps. Vice President and Managing Editor of *Pathways*, Joseph Laughon, a former member in the USNSCC, explained it this way,

Being a Sea Cadet was a huge experience for me in high school. I was just finding out who I was and was very interested in military service. Being homeschooled, JROTC wasn’t really an option for me, so I joined the USNSCC instead. It offered a ton of different interesting and challenging training; combat training, medical training and many more. Even though I was not able to join like I had planned due to medical disqualification, my time in the Sea Cadets not only gave me lifelong friends but also gave me the fortitude to know I can take on any challenge in my professional or personal life. If you are thinking of joining the military, the Sea Cadets is a great start.

Joining the military is a big step and one that you should prepare for. While you should always do research and talk to recruiters, serving your community in a JROTC company or in a similar organization can give you a network of mentors, educational resources and the preparation to let you know if military life is for you.





How to Talk to a Recruiter

If you do consider a career in the U.S. military, whether full or part-time, you will inevitably work with a military recruiter. This is an active duty servicemember, either enlisted or officer, whose main job is to help their particular branch of the military fulfill their recruitment quota. They will guide you through the signing process. They can be a wealth of information and help you decide if the military is right for you. But how can you best navigate this process? What questions should you ask? This essay can be a great start in making sure you use your interactions with military recruiters to the fullest potential benefit to you.

They Are There to Help, But They Have Their Own Goals

Military recruiters can be a great resource to help you decide if a life in the military is right for you. They are often service members who have been in for quite some time. They are there to answer your questions and help you qualify, sign and move you on to your basic training. From there, presuming you pass, you will be a service member in the U.S. military.

However military recruiters also have their own agenda: fulfilling their quota. In this way a recruiter is similar to a sales professional. They have their own goals to hit and they are trying to convince you to join. This doesn't mean they aren't trustworthy or good resources. However you should go into your early interactions with some caution. Do your own research and talk to current and former service personnel. This can help you form a fuller picture of what life will be like in the service.

Many recruiters encourage potential recruits to bring someone along, like a parent or a trusted mentor. If you can find a mentor or family member who used to serve or has experience with the service, this can help ease any nervousness and make sure you have an advocate with you in the room as you decide your future.

Be Professional

While you are giving your time, you are also taking time. It is always a good idea to be in the habit of being professional. If being a service member is a goal of yours, having your recruiter on your side is an important first step. Recruiters recommend some key habits:

- ◆ Be on time: five minutes early at a minimum always looks good to a field that highly values punctuality.
- ◆ Be professionally dressed: you are not in uniform yet, but demonstrating you can dress in a professional manner can be a good start.
- ◆ Take notes: not only will this help you remember information you may rely on later, but also demonstrates you are invested in your time with them.

Ask Questions

At the end of the day, it is your career and they are the resource. Asking questions will help you decide if this choice is even worth it for you. Additionally the military has both part time and full time service and six different branches with a multitude of different potential jobs and specialties. Asking questions can help point you in

the right direction to make sure this is the correct decision for you and your goals.

Recruiters recommend questions like:

- ◆ What is Basic Training really like?
- ◆ What kind of physical shape should I be in?
- ◆ How long do I have to serve?
- ◆ Can I choose the military job I want?
- ◆ What types of military jobs are there in your branch?
- ◆ What are all the ways a service member can earn college credits during enlistment?
- ◆ How does the recruiting process work from start to finish?

◆ Why should I join this branch?

Recruiters can be a great resource if you know how to approach them. Make sure you get your questions answered and the full facts about what your career could potentially look like to make sure it matches with your goals. Sergeant Justin Lloyd, U.S. Army, explains:

Whenever it comes time for me to help someone make that final decision, I always make sure that the Army aligns with what they want to do long-term. All of us have things we want to do. The Army is a part of the process of us getting there.





An Alternative The Peace Corps

The Peace Corps was established by President John F. Kennedy in 1961. Since that time, over 240,000 Americans have served in the Peace Corps in a variety of capacities and places. Some help build schools in developing nations, some teach classes in those schools, some help with economic development, some work in health care systems, and some work in agriculture. The principal requirements to serve in the Peace Corps are being a U.S. citizen and at least eighteen years old. Peace Corps volunteers usually will undergo three months of training and will need to demonstrate that they can integrate into their host country.

Peace Corps assignments are generally two years long, although there are shorter forms of service available. If being away this long will be difficult, you should consider if this is the right fit for you. Stephanie Ormston, who taught English in Azerbaijan notes,

“If you choose to join the Peace Corps, there will be moments that you will miss, and you have to decide if you’re okay with that.”

However, simultaneously, volunteers like Jessie Beck, who worked in Madagascar, explained,

Committing for two years is scary, but in all honesty, the time flew by. All of us undoubtedly missed some important events back home – which made us aware of just how long we had been out of the U.S. – but at the same time, most of us left service feeling as though we hadn’t accomplished all that we wanted to.

Often a combination of college and work experience is required. For some assignments, a bachelor’s degree is required. Admission to the Peace Corps is highly competitive. Approximately one in three applicants becomes a volunteer. Fluency in a foreign language is helpful, but not always required.

Living arrangements for volunteers are usually rather spartan, so you should probably



not consider the Peace Corps if you need pristine accommodations. Peace Corps receive a small housing and living allowance, and receive complimentary medical and dental service during their term. Volunteers typically work forty hours per week. Occasionally, Peace Corps volunteers have experienced violence, and even death, in their assigned countries, but such instances are rare. Most Peace Corps volunteers contend that their experience in the Peace Corps transformed their lives for the better. The education and experience of working in another country can not only enhance a volunteer's career prospects, but can also enrich the volunteer's cultural and social capital.



In Depth:

The U.S. Military Academy

Should You Attend the United States Military Academy?

Located in West Point, New York, the United States Military Academy, usually simply called West Point, is one of the top military academies in the United States, alongside the U.S. Naval Academy, and the U.S. Air Force Academy. Students graduate with a B.S. and a commission in the United States Army. It's a top tier school and one of the most selective in the United States. But is it right for you?

Quick Facts:

The majority of the faculty are military personnel, with roughly 25% of the professors being civilians. The graduating class size is roughly 1,000 cadets per year. West Point offers 45 different majors, from foreign languages, engineering, history, and economics.

Costs:

The American military academies are unique among colleges in that they are entirely free. Tuition is \$0 since 100% of students are paying for their college course with service in the Army. While students do not have to pay for their tuition, this cost-free college education is balanced by the extremely selective admission rates and the fact that every graduate commits to a term of service as an Army officer. Roughly 12% of applicants are accepted but 99% of its admitted students graduate. In addition applicants must be at least 17 but cannot be older than 23, they must be a U.S. citizen



and unmarried with no dependents, and have an extremely high highschool GPA (the average among applicants is usually 3.9). On top of all of this rigorous qualification, a student must be nominated either by their Congressional representative, a senior officer in the U.S. military or the Vice President of the United States. So while it is true that West Point is "free," there is a massive cost in effort required to attend.

Student Life:

The student life is highly regimented and students are treated as enlisted in the U.S. military. For instance, a cadet's day starts before their first meal (which is held at 0655 or 6:55AM), and their first class starts around 0735 (or 7:55AM). While there is time given for free time or extracurricular activities, your day will be mostly filled with classes, physical exercise and military training. It is definitely not for the faint of heart. There is a heavy emphasis on military discipline. Each student has to enroll in either Boxing or Physical Development as classes and will pass certain physical fitness tests along with their academics.

Extra Curricular Offerings

West Point also offers several extracurriculars through the office of the Directorate of Cadet Activities. There are over 100 extracurricular clubs like the Amateur Radio Club, the Glee Club, the Sailing Team and the Water Polo Team.

Famously, West Point has their NCAA men's football team. One of the social highlights of the year for cadets is the Army-Navy game, which is always televised. West Point also offers a variety of other NCAA teams like the men's lacrosse team, the women's basketball team and the men's basketball team. Roughly 15% of the students participate in a club sport or team and an additional 65% compete in an intramural sport.

Notable Alumni

Founded in 1802, West Point has a long tradition of being attended by some of the country's top military, political and business leaders. By attending West Point, you will be grouped among some of the most dedicated and accomplished alumni of any institution of higher learning in the United States. Notable alumni include, but are certainly not limited to:

- ◆ Former presidents of the United States like Ulysses S. Grant and Dwight D Eisenhower
- ◆ Army generals such as William T. Sherman, Douglas MacArthur and David Petraeus

- ◆ NFL football players like Josh McNary and Brett Toth
- ◆ Business professionals like Jim Kinsey, co-founder of AOL and Bob McDonald, CEO of Proctor & Gamble
- ◆ West Point also has some notable non-graduates like American author Edgar Allan Poe and artist James Whistler

Is It Worth It?

Before you commit to any college, in particular a military academy, you should count up the cost. While tuition is free, there is a huge commitment both before and after graduation. The process of qualifying is grueling. Once there it is sometimes compared to boot camp but lasting four years. On top of this, you are paying for your education with service. You commit to a minimum of five years active service and three years of inactive reserve. For some, being in the military is tedious and difficult. Your years can be filled with low pay, multiple moves, potential family separation and occupational hazards. Many find this daunting and unenjoyable. For others, the service and life experience gained in the U.S. Army remains one of the proudest things they have ever done, filled with experiences simply unfound anywhere else. Talk to veterans, alumni and recruiters before you make any commitment to join.



An Interview

with a West Point Graduate



Jefferson Oakes

Jefferson Oakes is the Program Resource Management (PRM) Lead for the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Immunization Services Division.

Prior to the CDC, Jeff worked for FEMA, the agency's first regional budget coordinator. Prior to FEMA, Jeff worked for the Department of the Army. His employment came after five years on active duty with the U.S. Army. He served as a platoon leader, company executive officer, brigade ammunition officer, brigade logistics plans officer, and assistant brigade comptroller, attaining the rank of Captain.

Jeff earned a bachelor's degree in military history from the United States Military Academy in 1998, and earned Master of Business Administration and Master of Public Administration degrees from Syracuse University in 2008.

North Star Pathways: What motivated you to attend your university?

Jefferson Oakes: I was excited about the chance to be an Army officer. I also really appreciated that there would be no job search after graduation—the Army would give me a job and a place to live.

Pathways: Do you feel like there was an opportunity cost in attending this university as opposed to another path?

Oakes: Absolutely! The experience of attending a service academy is much different than a regular university, with many more restrictions

on our personal lives. We did not have the freedom to choose what to wear or how to decorate our rooms. We couldn't have a car on campus until junior year, and we could only leave campus a certain number of weekends per year. So this was not a typical "college experience" like most students have.

Pathways: What would you say were the biggest benefits to your time at your school?

Oakes: The first is exposure to many different areas of study. The curriculum at West Point is very broad, and all cadets, regardless of major, take a large number of common courses across several academic disciplines. The second is the development that every cadet receives to learn how to be a leader of character. West Point trains its cadets not just to get a degree, but to be leaders, and to have high moral and ethical standards.

Pathways: What would you do to maximize your time in getting a head start in your field?

Oakes: There are many opportunities to attend military training or specialized academic experiences that allow cadets to get a bit of a leg up, and every cadet will get these opportunities. Everyone graduates with the training they need to be a successful Army officer.

Pathways: How can a high schooler prepare for your field?

Oakes: The best thing a high school student can do is to show themselves to be well rounded. The service academies want students who are smart, physically fit, and able to learn and lead others. Many West Point cadets were varsity athletes in high school, as well as being involved in academic clubs or service organizations. Being involved in JROTC is nice, but not necessary, since not all schools have a chapter. In addition, all the service academies have liaison officers, whose job is to assist interested high school students in gaining admission to the



various academies. Any high school student who wants to attend an academy should contact that liaison officer to get a good understanding of the admissions process and things they can do to stand out.

Pathways: What was the student life at your school? Did it aid your future career or inhibit it?

Oakes: Student life is unique, because of the military aspect of the school. All undergraduates live together in coed barracks. All cadets are involved in some sort of sports during the year, from NCAA athletics to intramural sports. Even so, there are dozens of social and academic clubs to be involved in. Being involved in extracurricular activities was a great way to meet different people, which helps once you graduate and are out in the Army.

Pathways: Are there any mistakes you can think of that a new person in your field and at your school can avoid?

Oakes: One of the tougher lessons to learn as a new cadet (or a new officer, for that matter) is humility. It's good to remember that you don't know it all and that you can always benefit from getting feedback and corrections from those around you.

Pathways: What do you see as the future of your field?

Oakes: Military officers will always be in demand. But, more importantly, employers know the value of an academy education, and academy graduates are in high demand in corporate America.

Pathways: What was your average day like as a military officer?

Oakes: This can really vary depending on what your branch/MOS is, what sort of unit you're in, where you're stationed, etc. For me, a typical day was: physical training (PT) from 6:30-7:30 each morning, with an hour and a half to clean up and eat breakfast before starting my regular "9-5" workday that often went beyond 5PM. I was an ordnance officer, so I spent a lot of my days dealing with the logistics of ammunition storage, issue, and return. That involved supervising soldiers and working with officers and NCOs from other units to meet their needs. While I never had to deploy, I went

on several field training events, where we would train for days or even weeks at a time without coming home. There's rarely an "average" day in the military!

Pathways: How long does it take to get established in an MOS?

Oakes: Every West Point graduate will be assigned to a branch (like Infantry or Engineers) before graduation, and goes to Officer Basic Course after graduation from school. Even so, it takes time to learn all the nuances of your branch. The Army has a good education system meant to teach those things as officers progress through their career. But most learning happens on the job. Every new lieutenant will have 18-24 months as a platoon leader, directly responsible for a couple of dozen soldiers. After a few years, lieutenants are promoted to captains, who command companies of 40-200 soldiers. Other command opportunities come later in an officer's career, but every officer will have a new job opportunity every 2-3 years. This is a career field where you're guaranteed to have a lot of variety!

Pathways: What opportunities do you see for individuals working in your field, or for your field of study writ large to better our society?

Oakes: The Army will always be here, so there are plenty of opportunities for people to make a career of it. Many West Point graduates go on after their military time to serve their communities as political office holders, business executives, religious leaders, or leaders of nonprofit organizations.

Pathways: What is one piece of advice you would give to your younger self, while examining your future?

Oakes: Learn to study! In high school, academics came easy to me, so I didn't have a good idea of how to apply myself to studying. I was usually able to absorb what my teachers said in class or remember how I solved my homework problems and turn around and do well on tests. This did not work at West Point! I had to learn how to study well so that I could retain what I was learning. If I could do things over again, I would learn good study skills in high school so that I would be able to hit the ground running my first semester at college.



Review: The U.S. Naval Academy

Should You Attend the United States Naval Academy?

Located in Annapolis, the United States Naval Academy, usually simply called Annapolis or the Naval Academy, is one of the top military academies in the United States, alongside the U.S. Military Academy, and the U.S. Air Force Academy. Students graduate with a B.S. and a commission in the United States Navy. It's a top tier school and one of the most selective in the United States. But is it right for you?

Quick Facts:

The Naval Academy is unique in that the faculty are split evenly between actively serving military officers and civilians. The graduating class size is roughly 1,000 cadets per year. Annapolis offers three different divisions of study; Engineering and Weapons, Mathematics and Science, and Humanities and Social Sciences. There are 22 different majors to choose from, though by law all students graduate with a Bachelor's in Science.





The Naval Academy places a major emphasis on the hard sciences, even their motto is *Ex Scientia Tridens*, which means “Through Knowledge, Sea Power.”

Costs:

The American military academies are unique among colleges in that they are entirely free. Tuition is \$0 since 100% of students are paying for their college course with service in the Navy or the Marine Corps (who do not have their own academy). While students do not have to pay for their tuition, this cost-free college education is balanced by the extremely selective admission rates and the fact that every graduate commits to a term of service as a naval officer. Roughly 10-11% of applicants are accepted but 88% of its admitted students graduate in four years (90% graduate after six). In addition applicants must be at least 17 but cannot be older than 23, they must be a U.S. citizen and unmarried with no dependents, and have an extremely high highschool GPA. On top of all of this rigorous qualification, a student must be nominated either by their Congressional representative, a senior officer in the U.S. military or the Vice President of the United States. So while it is true that the Naval Academy is “free,” there is a massive cost in effort required to attend.

Student Life:

The student life is highly regimented and students are treated as midshipmen in the U.S. Navy, even

if they intend on joining the Marine Corps. For instance, a midshipman’s day will often start with an optional work out at 0530 or 5:30AM. From there, the day is filled with three meals, classes, some down time and military drill and training. On average the day usually ends close to midnight. Admissions staff at the USNA will warn prospective students, “When you add to this schedule the time required for military duties, inspection preparation and extra academic instruction, you can see the demands on your time are considerable.”

Extra Curricular Offerings

Annapolis also offers several extracurriculars. There are over 100 extracurricular clubs like the Debate Club, the CrossFit Club, the Parachute Team and the Mountaineering Club.

Famously, like West Point, Annapolis has their NCAA men’s football team. Also like the Army, one of the social highlights of the year for midshipmen is the Army-Navy game. Annapolis also offers 30 other NCAA teams like the men’s baseball team, the women’s crew team and the men’s rugby team.

Notable Alumni

Founded in 1845, the USNA has a long tradition of being attended by some of the country’s top military, political and business leaders. By attending Annapolis, you will be grouped among some of the most dedicated and accomplished alumni of any institution of higher learning in the United States.



Notable alumni include, but are certainly not limited to:

- ◆ Former U.S. president Jimmy Carter, who graduated in 1946.
- ◆ Former senator and U.S. presidential candidate John McCain, who graduated in 1958 (his father and grandfather were also high ranking naval officers and alumni).
- ◆ Admiral William “Bull” Halsey, who graduated in 1904.
- ◆ NASA astronaut Wendy B. Lawrence, who graduated in 1981.
- ◆ TV host and actor Montel Williams, who graduated in 1980 and was the first Black Marine to attend the USNA.

Is It Worth It?

Before you commit to any college, in particular a military academy, you should count up the cost. While tuition is free, there is a huge commitment both before and after graduation. The process of qualifying is grueling. Once there it is sometimes compared to boot camp but lasting four years. On top of this, you are paying for your education with service. You commit to a minimum of five years active service and three years of inactive reserve. For some, being in the military is tedious and difficult. Your years can be filled with low pay, multiple moves, potential family separation and occupational hazards. Many find this daunting and unenjoyable. For others, the service and life experience gained in the U.S. Navy or the U.S. Marine Corps remains one of the proudest things they have ever done, filled with experiences simply unfound anywhere else. Talk to veterans, alumni and recruiters before you make any commitment to join.





most selective in the United States. But is it right for you?

Quick Facts:

The Coast Guard Academy was founded in 1876 as an instructional school for the Revenue Service, which was one of the earliest federal law enforcement agencies to stop piracy, smuggling and illegal slave trading off the coasts of the United States. In 1915, the Life Saving Service, which was dedicated to saving mariners, was combined with the Revenue Service to form one of the branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, which was called the Coast Guard.

The graduating class size is roughly 200-250 cadets per year. The USCGA is unique in that its academics can be hyper specialized to service in the Coast Guard with many majors that will not be found in other colleges or even military academies. For more standard courses, students can take electives at the nearby Connecticut College.

Costs:

The American military academies are unique among colleges in that they are entirely free. Tuition is \$0 since 100% of students are paying for their college course with service in the Coast Guard. While students do not have to pay for their tuition, this cost-free college education is balanced by the extremely selective admission rates and the fact that every graduate commits to a term of service as a Coast Guard officer. The Coast Guard Academy has one of the most selective admission processes of any U.S. military academy. There are roughly 2,000 applicants every year and at most 200 to 250 are selected. Unlike

Review:



The U.S. Coast Guard Academy

Should You Attend the United States Coast Guard Academy?

Located in New London, Connecticut, the United States Coast Guard Academy (USCGA), is one of the top military

academies in the United States, alongside the U.S. Military Academy, and the U.S. Naval Academy. Students graduate with a B.S. and a commission in the United States Coast Guard. It's a top tier school and one of the



West Point or Annapolis, applicants cannot get in due to a congressional recommendation but rather purely on academic and personal merit. So while it is true that the Coast Guard Academy is “free,” there is a massive cost in effort required to attend.

Student Life:

The student life is highly regimented and students are treated as enlisted in the U.S. Coast Guard. For instance, a

cadets day will start with morning drill formation at 0600 or 6:00AM. From there, the day is filled with three meals, classes, some down time and rigorous military drill and training. On average the day usually ends between 10PM to midnight.

Extra Curricular Offerings

The USCGA also offers several extracurriculars. There are several extracurricular clubs such as Music and Drama

clubs, Pride, Honor Societies, and Academic Clubs. The Coast Guard Academy competes in the NCAA Division III in a variety of different athletics such as men’s and women’s basketball, men’s wrestling, and women’s softball. Due to their history as a maritime instructional school, the USCGA puts a major emphasis on sailing and has routinely won the Inter-Collegiate Sailing Association’s championship.

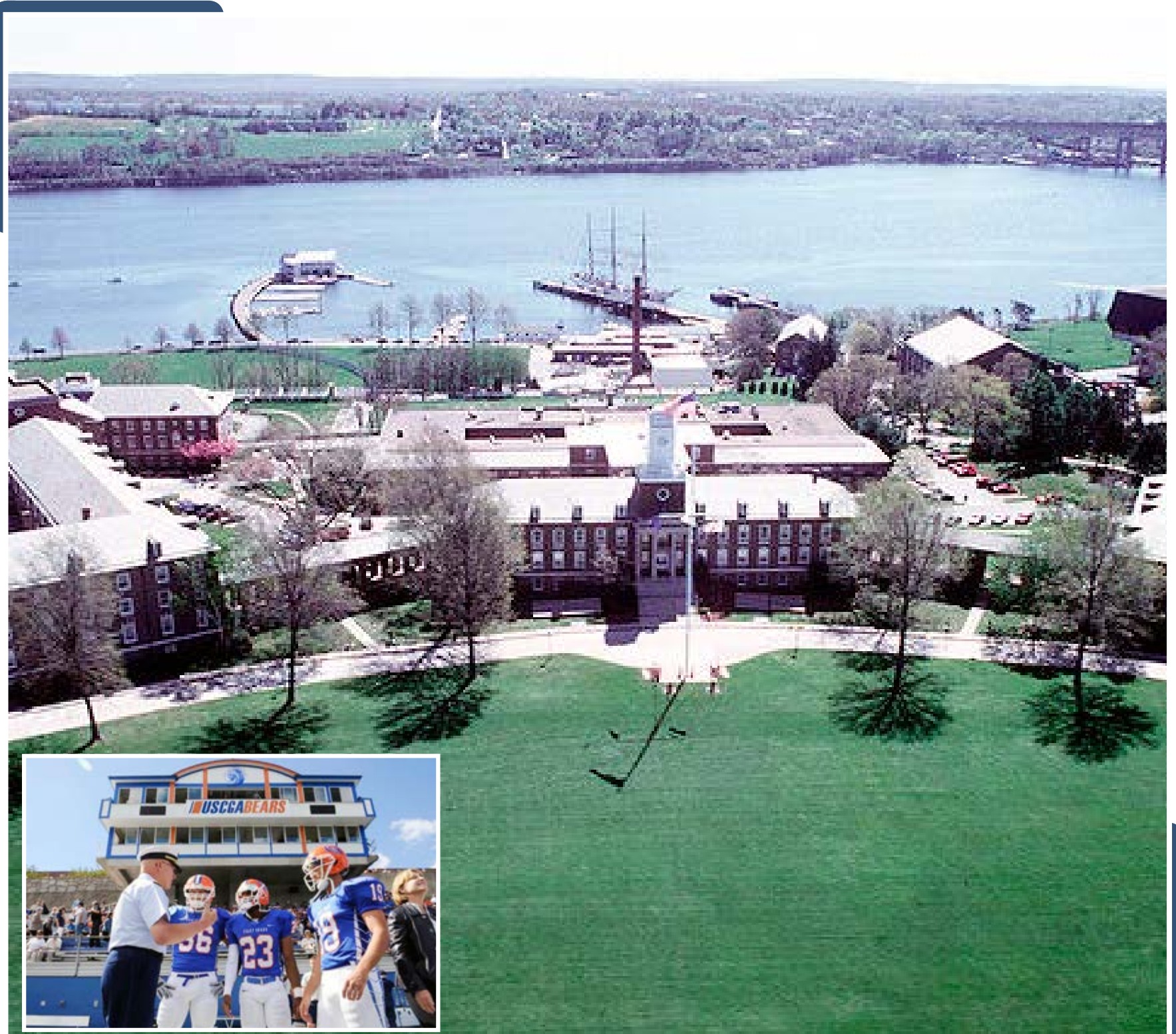
Notable Alumni

Founded in 1876, the USCGA has a long tradition of being attended by some of the country’s top military, political and business leaders. By attending the Academy at New London, you will be grouped among some of the most dedicated and accomplished alumni of any institution of higher learning in the United States. Notable alumni include, but are certainly not limited to:

- ◆ Admiral Karl L. Schultze, 26th Commandant of the Coast Guard (2018–2022)
- ◆ Daniel C. Burbank, a NASA astronaut who served on two Space Shuttle missions.
- ◆ Stephen E. Flynn, scholar, author, and current chair of the Council on Foreign Relations
- ◆ Scott E. Langum, former helicopter pilot who personally saved 168 people during Hurricane Katrina
- ◆ Nikki Barnes, sailing champion & U.S. Olympian.

Is It Worth It?

Before you commit to any college, in particular a military academy, you should count up the cost. While tuition is free, there is a huge commitment both before and after graduation. The process of qualifying is grueling. Once there it is sometimes compared to basic training but lasting four years. On top of this, you are paying for your education with service. You commit to a minimum of five years active service. For some, being in the Coast Guard is tedious and difficult. Your years can be filled with low pay, multiple moves, potential family separation and occupational hazards. Many find this daunting and unenjoyable. For others, the service and life experience gained in the U.S. Coast Guard remains one of the proudest things they have ever done, filled with experiences simply unfound anywhere else. Talk to veterans, alumni and recruiters before you make any commitment to join.





Review:

The California Maritime Academy

Should You Attend the California Maritime Academy?

Located in Vallejo in northern California, the California Maritime Academy, usually simply called CalMaritime, is

one of the top maritime academies in the world. Students can graduate with either a graduate or undergraduate degree, all of them specializing in nautical curriculum. Many go on to careers in the Navy, Coast Guard, Merchant Marine or the maritime industry. It's a top tier school that specializes in a field that is highly lucrative. But is it right for you?

Quick Facts:

Founded in 1929 as the California Nautical School, it was established by the California legislature as a school, "to give practical and theoretical instruction in navigation [and] seamanship...in order to prepare young men to

serve as officers in the American Merchant Marine." In 1939, they changed the name to the California Maritime Academy and began granting Bachelor of Science degrees right before WWII.

Costs:

Unlike military academies, the California Maritime Academy does charge its applicants tuition. For in-state students, CalMaritime charges \$7,116 in tuition and for out-of-state students, they charge \$18,996 in tuition. This is lower than the average tuition both for in-state California students and the national average of out-of-state tuition.

Student Life:

The student life is highly regimented and students are required to be members of the California Maritime Academy Corps of Cadets. Students at CalMaritime are referred to as Cadets, they wear military-style uniforms, practice military discipline and organization as well as use a demerit based disciplinary system.

Unlike a military academy, students are not required to join the U.S. military. However CalMaritime offers several avenues to expedited military service through either an ROTC program for Navy, Marine Corps or Air Force officers, a Strategic Sealift Officers program or the Coast Guard Auxiliary University Program.

Extra Curricular Offerings

CalMaritime's athletics program is called the Keelhaulers and is a member of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics through the California Pacific Conference. They offer 14 different varsity sports for both men and

women, ranging from men's basketball, women's crew, and men's golf.

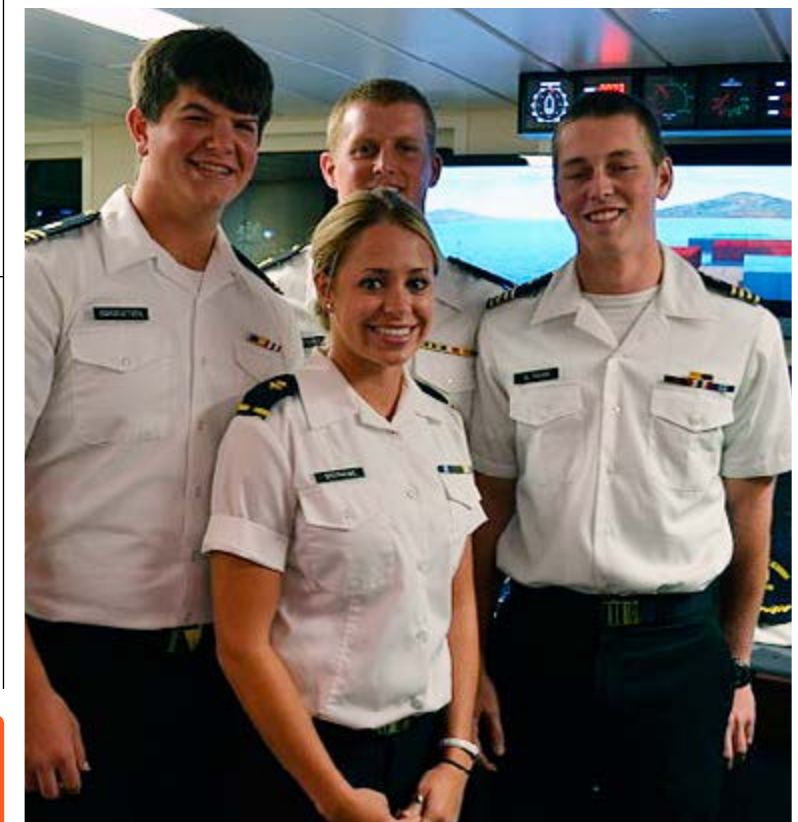
Notable Alumni

Notable alumni include, but are certainly not limited to:

- ◆ Vice Admiral Daniel Dwyer, USN, commander of the United States Second Fleet
- ◆ Ryan T. Holte Judge, United States Court of Federal Claims
- ◆ Staff Sergeant Cassell J. Wiggins, USMC, served in Iraq and Afghanistan as an Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician, and was awarded the Bronze Star with Combat V
- ◆ Jamila Reinhardt, a professional American rugby union player and Women's Premier League national champion.
- ◆ Kate McCue, a cruise ship captain, the first woman to be named captain of a Mega cruise ship and starred in the show Celebrity Summit.

Is It Worth It?

Before you commit to any college, in particular a military-style academy, you should count up the cost. Unlike West Point or Annapolis, tuition is not free but you will also receive a highly ranked education with several opportunities to join the military service. CalMaritime is also a highly ranked regional school on the West Coast and is listed as one of the top public schools in California. Additionally graduates often go on to have a much higher salary than the national median after graduating, making \$73,000 annually compared to \$67,000. However if you want to pursue a military career directly, you may be better served by directly joining or trying to apply to a traditional military academy.





Review:

The Royal Military Academy



Should You Attend the United States Military Academy?

Located in Camberley in the United Kingdom, the Royal Military Academy, usually simply called Sandhurst, is one of the top military academies in the world. Students graduate with a commission in the British Army. It's a top tier military training school and one of the most selective in the world. But could it be right for you?

Quick Facts:

The faculty are entirely British military personnel, split between officers and experienced senior enlisted personnel, called non-commissioned officers. Unlike other nation's military academies like West Point in the United States or the Royal Military College in Canada, it is not a university

Costs:

Sandhurst, like its American military counterparts, is entirely free. There is no tuition since it is the training institution for the British Army. Those who graduate serve for a minimum of 3 years though most officers in the British Army will serve for 8-12 years. Officers for the regular or reserve service are chosen by the Army Officer Selection Board. From there, they are assessed. In any given year 10-15% of applicants are accepted. 80% of accepted applicants already have a college degree, though this is not a requirement.

Can Americans Join?

Since 2009, the U.S. Army has sent one officer to graduate from Sandhurst and there has been one American as a part of every commissioning course every year. Roughly 10% of the applicants are from overseas, mostly former British commonwealth countries.

Student Life:

The student life is highly regimented and students are treated as enlisted in the British military. The day will be mostly filled with technical classes, physical exercise and military training. As you will be a service member in the British Army, naturally there is a heavy emphasis on military discipline.



The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst

Cadets enroll in three different courses or sets of training, which will determine how long you serve at the Academy. The Regular Commissioning Course lasts 44 weeks for officers who will directly enter the regular service. The Short Commissioning Course lasts 8 weeks and is for Army Reserve officers. Lastly there is the Late Entry Officer Course for enlisted British Army soldiers entering the officer ranks. While not offering degrees, Sandhurst does work with the Open University to award those attending the Regular Commissioning Course 120 credits towards an Honors Degree in International Studies. Cadets can also earn a BSc in Leadership and Strategic Studies through their military service from the University of Reading.

Extra Curricular Offerings

Sandhurst does not offer many of the traditional extracurriculars as it is more similar to Officer Candidate School, than a traditional university or military academy like we know here in the United States.

However the school does host the Sandhurst Competition, which is a two day military skills competition that began in 1967. Students compete in squads in course navigation, rappelling, rafting, rifle marksmanship, weapons handling, and a 12 foot wall climb. Prince Harry, the Duke of Sussex, competed in the Sandhurst competition as a cadet when he was serving in the British Army. The competition hosts competitors from the Royal Military College in Canada, West Point, the Air Force Academy and several colleges' ROTC programs.



Notable Alumni

Founded in 1801, Sandhurst has a long tradition of being attended by some of the UK's top military, political and business leaders. By attending Sandhurst, you will be grouped among some of the most dedicated and accomplished alumni of any institution of higher learning in the world. Notable alumni include, but are certainly not limited to:

- ◆ Former royals such as Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex and King Abdullah II of Jordan
- ◆ Former British politicians such as Sir William Churchill, a former Prime Minister, and Sir Iain Duncan Smith, former Member of Parliament
- ◆ Authors and songwriters such as Ian Fleming, author of the James Bond novels, and James Blunt
- ◆ Business professionals like Geoffrey Kent, Founder and Chairman Emeritus of Abercrombie & Kent
- ◆ Devon Harris, Jamaican Olympian and co-founder of the Jamaican national bobsled team.

Is It Worth It?

Before you commit to any college, in particular a military academy, you should count up the cost. Sandhurst will not bring a degree like many other academies though you can get a degree if you apply yourself. For some, being in the military is tedious and difficult. Your years can be filled with low pay, multiple moves, potential family separation and occupational hazards. Many find this daunting and unenjoyable. For others, the service and life experience gained in the British Army remains one of the proudest things they have ever done, filled with experiences simply unfound anywhere else. Talk to veterans, alumni and recruiters before you make any commitment to join.

What's It Like to Serve in the U.S. Army?



The U.S. Army is the oldest branch of the United States Armed Forces, responsible for its ground warfare component. As of 2024, there are a little over 1 million uniformed Army personnel, with less than half serving as full time professional soldiers and the rest serving part time in the U.S. Army Reserves or the Army National Guard. It can offer an exciting career with a host of different options, but is it right for you?

Qualifying and Joining

First you will need to speak to an Army recruiter. They will inform you about a career and life in the Army as well as guide you through the process of joining. You will be working closely with them. Our article “How to Talk to A Recruiter” earlier in this issue will help with some pointers on how to make this relationship work smoothly.

Next you will pass an aptitude test known as the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery or ASVAB. This will help you qualify for a certain job. There is a degree of choice but also the Army will assign you depending on how you score as well as the Army's need. Studying for this is highly recommended as the higher you score, the more you can qualify for. Lastly you will sign a contract and prepare for Basic Training.

U.S. Army Basic Training lasts 10 weeks and is a grueling process of elimination. You will be tested and trained on how to be a soldier. From there you will go to later training like Combat Training and eventually Advanced Individual Training for the specific job or specialty you qualified for.

Specialties and Occupations

In the Army there are a multitude of different roles, or Military Occupational Specialties (MOS), that work together to create an effective fighting force. As a result there are a variety of different branches, and corps within the Army, like the Infantry Branch, the Signal Corps, or the Armor Branch.

Some will directly involve fighting like the Ground Forces and others are more support roles like Logistics or Signals & Intelligence. Your recruiter can help you find roles that you are interested in and help you prepare for qualification.

Also in the Army there is the Active Duty Component, the Reserves and also the National Guard. While serving as active duty is a full time job, the Reserves and National Guard will serve part time, though they can be called up to serve full time depending on the situation.



Compensation and Benefits

As a private fresh out of Basic Training, you will make \$23,011. This is relatively low but goes up as you progress through the ranks and serve more years. For instance a Staff Sergeant with 8 years of more experience will make more than double this annually. While military pay is lower than what people can make in the private sector, the military will also pay for a significant portion of your housing (known as a Basic Housing Allowance) and pay for your medical care through TRICARE.

Once you leave the service, there are many benefits to being a veteran such as educational benefits, getting the GI Bill to pay for your college, tuition assistance, retirement pay and helping you buy a home.

Learn From A Veteran

Ken Wooten is former U.S. Army soldier who served in the U.S. Army Reserves. He now works in the energy sector as an Assistant Powerhouse Operator at the Merced Irrigation District in California.

Pathways: What motivated you to serve in the military and in the Army specifically?

Ken Wooten: I was working in a restaurant as a cook and making poor life choices. A co-worker of mine was in the reserves and recommended that I check it out. He thought it would be a good fit for me.

Pathways: What would you say were the biggest benefits to your time in the service?

Ken Wooten: Because my primary driver was to get out of the rut I was in and away from the people I was around, the biggest benefit for me was getting away from it all while at basic and MOS school. The technical training I received while there turned out to be quite important too.

Pathways: What would you do to maximize your time in getting a head start in the military?

Ken Wooten: Don't do it like I did. Go in with a plan. Know what it is you want to do in the military that will best suit you for an outside career, unless your goal is to make a career of the military. For example if you want to be a pilot, stay in school, get a degree and join as an officer, and then pursue pilot training.

Pathways: How can a high schooler prepare for being a soldier?

Ken Wooten: Go join the ROTC.

Pathways: What was the work life in the service? Did serving in the military aid your future career or inhibit it?

Ken Wooten: I was a reservist and I didn't enjoy the monthly drills. I was a microwave systems operator/maintainer. I received a bunch of training on how to troubleshoot

microwave communication systems but my job at my unit was replacing batteries and loading crypto in radios. I also struggled with being civilian 90% of the time and a soldier for my drill weekend. I feel I would have done better if I had gone active duty and been a soldier 100% of the time.

Pathways: Are there any mistakes you can think of that a new person in the Army can avoid?

Ken Wooten: The biggest mistake a new soldier can make is to go in with a chip on your shoulder. Basic training is there to break you down so they can build you back up so that you can work as a team within your unit. The more you resist that, the harder training will be. Realize early on that the drill sergeants don't actually hate you but they do have to get you in shape; so they will "punish" you with exercise at every opportunity.

Ultimately, the discipline and technical training I received in the military has been instrumental to the success I have had in my career.





What's It Like to Serve in the U.S. Navy?



The U.S. Navy is the one of the oldest branches of the United States Armed Forces, responsible for its maritime warfare component. As of 2024, there are a little over 387,000 uniformed Navy personnel, with most serving as full time professional sailors and the rest serving part time in the U.S. Navy Reserves. It can offer an exciting career with a host of different options, but is it right for you?

Qualifying and Joining

First you will need to speak to a Navy recruiter. They will inform you about a career and life in the Navy as well as guide you through the process of joining. You will be working closely with them. Our article “How to Talk to A Recruiter” earlier in this issue will help with some pointers on how to make this relationship work smoothly.

Next you will pass an aptitude test known as the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery or ASVAB. This will help you qualify for a certain job. There is a degree of choice but also the Navy will assign you depending on how you score as well as the Navy's need. Studying for this is highly recommended as the higher you score, the more you can qualify for. Lastly you will sign a contract and prepare for Basic Training.

U.S. Navy Basic Training lasts 10 weeks and is a grueling process of elimination.

You will be tested and trained on how to be a sailor. From there you will go to later training your first duty station or “A School,” where you will study on the specific job you selected.

Specialties and Occupations

In the Navy there are a multitude of different roles, or ratings, that work together to create an effective fighting force. As a result you can be in the U.S. Navy and serve as a chaplain to minister to sailors or serve as a special operations combat professional in the U.S. Navy SEALs.

The primary of the U.S. Navy is to help the U.S. military operate on the ocean. Most of the world is water, a huge portion of the American economy relies on overseas trade, and the United States is unique in that it is both the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean. Being able to defend the United States on the ocean is the ultimate job of every U.S. Navy sailor, but that ultimate mission is supported by different specialties.

Some will directly involve fighting like operating the weapons system on a destroyer or a submarine others are more support roles like an Information Systems Technician



or a Machinist's Mate. Your recruiter can help you find roles that you are interested in and help you prepare for qualification.

Also in the Navy there is the Active Duty Component and the Reserves. While serving as active duty is a full time job, sailors in the Reserves serve part time, though they can be called up to serve full time depending on the situation.

Compensation and Benefits

As a Seaman Apprentice fresh out of Basic Training, you will make \$20,340. This is relatively low but goes up as you progress through the ranks and serve more years. For instance a Petty Officer First Class with 8 years of more experience will make more

than double this annually. While military pay is lower than what people can make in the private sector, the military will also pay for a significant portion of your housing (known as a Basic Housing Allowance) and pay for your medical care through TRICARE.

Once you leave the service, there are many benefits to being a veteran such as educational benefits, getting the GI Bill to pay for your college, tuition assistance, retirement pay and helping you buy a home.

The Navy can be an exciting career, not only because of the later educational and housing benefits but because you can serve all across the world from Japan to the coast of Maine and nearly everywhere in between. Talking to a recruiter can help decide if this commitment is right for you.



Al Nolf, a Senior Chief Petty Officer, who served from 1968-1989 summed up his time in the Navy this way:

I joined the Navy to “See the World.” College was not an option for me, and I wanted to get out there and do, see, try, taste, feel, learn, I wanted to experience the world! I lived on 6 warships, visited 40 countries, dived the reefs of Australia, and played in a band in San Francisco. I met my wife in Los Angeles, had a son in Reno, re-enlisted at a ceremony inside the Alamo in San Antonio, and a lot more.

Some of it was tough. I served in combat in Vietnam, and was there helping with the evacuation of Saigon at the end of the war. I’ve walked the decks of a destroyer in the North Atlantic in 40 foot seas and worked all night unloading ships on an island in the South Pacific. I learned to drive forklifts with tires 6 feet tall, cranes, and semi trucks, and my friends taught me to play guitar. I attended Navy schools of all kinds: Survival, Counseling, Leadership, Management, Independent Duty, Supply School, Cargo Handling, and 20 more. It’s hard, it’s the hardest job you’ll ever love!

It’s military. You’ll march, salute, stand inspection, work 8 to 16 hour days, and hate your bosses – just like being a civilian — except you’ll be doing it wearing a Navy uniform, earning good money, advancing in your career, and becoming an adult in your own right. You’ll be confident, capable, responsible, brave, fit, strong, smart, and a member of the world’s biggest fraternity. You get out what you put in. Honestly, If I wasn’t too old now, I’d go back in, in a heartbeat. You’ll never have better friends, learn more, or carry more pride than when you wear that Navy uniform!



UNITED STATES NAVY





What's It Like to Serve in the U.S. Marine Corps?

The U.S. Marine Corps is one of the oldest branches of the United States Armed Forces, being founded during the American Revolutionary War. It was initially responsible as a means of assisting the early U.S. Navy. Now its main mission is to perform amphibious operations. As such Marines famously fight on the air, land and sea. As of 2024, there are a little over 200,000 Marines, with most serving full time the rest serving part time in the Marine Corps Reserves. It can offer an exciting career and life, but is it right for you?

Qualifying and Joining

First you will need to speak to a Marine Corps recruiter. They will inform you about a career and life in the Corps as well as guide you through the process of joining. You will be working closely with them. Our article "How to Talk to A Recruiter" earlier in this issue will help with some pointers on how to make this relationship work smoothly.

Next you will pass an aptitude test known as the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery or ASVAB. This will help you qualify for a certain job. There is a degree of choice but also the Marine Corps will assign you depending on how you score as well as the need. Studying for this is highly recommended as the higher you score, the more you can qualify for. Lastly you will sign a contract and prepare for Basic Training.

All military branches will require a physical fitness aptitude but the Marine Corps has one of the most demanding, requiring a recruit to run 3 miles, perform a number of pull ups or push ups and a timed plank. To prepare, you should aim to be in peak physical shape.



U.S. Marine Corps Basic Training is one of the longest at 13 weeks and is a brutal process. You will be trained to be a combat Marine, first and foremost. From there you will go to later training like Marine Combat Training and eventually for the specialty you qualified for.

Specialties and Occupations

In the Marines there are a multitude of different roles, or Military Occupational Specialties (MOS), that work together to create an effective amphibious fighting force. Some will directly involve fighting. These can be the infantry, field artillery, amphibious assault vehicles or the special forces. Others will be support roles like logistics, aerial refueling and intelligence. Your recruiter can help you find roles that you are interested in and help you prepare for qualification.

Also in the Marine Corps there is the Active Duty Component and the Reserves. While serving as active duty is a full time job, the Reserves serve part time, though they can be activated to serve full time depending on the situation.

Compensation and Benefits

As a private fresh out of Basic Training, you will make \$24,204. This is relatively low but goes up as you progress through the ranks and serve more years. For instance a Staff Sergeant with 8 years of more experience will make more than double this annually. While military pay is lower than what people can make in the private sector, the military will also pay for a significant portion of your housing (known as a Basic Housing Allowance) and pay

for your medical care through TRICARE.

Once you leave the service, there are many benefits to being a veteran such as educational benefits, getting the GI Bill to pay for your college, tuition assistance, retirement pay and helping you buy a home.

Being a Marine is more than just a job and is a whole way of life as you serve out your term of service. Howard Grant, a former Sergeant, put it this way:

It will be the best, and worst, time of your life. The highs will be extremely high and the lows will be extremely low. You'll grow as a person. You'll get to know yourself. You'll challenge yourself countless times. You'll learn the meaning of teamwork, loyalty, dedication, duty, esprit de corps, leadership, responsibility, punctuality, honesty and being part of an organization that is unique as we are admired, respected, and feared by many around the world.





What's It Like to Serve in the U.S. Air Force?

Next you will pass an aptitude test known as the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery or ASVAB. This will help you qualify for a certain job. There is a degree of choice but also the Air Force will assign you depending on how you score as well as the Air Force's need. Studying for this is highly recommended as the higher you score, the more you can qualify for. Lastly you will sign a contract and prepare for Basic Training.

U.S. Air Force Basic Training lasts approximately 8 weeks and is a grueling process of elimination. You will be tested and trained on how to be an airman. From there you will go to later technical training for the specialty you qualified for.

The U.S. Air Force is one of the newest branches of the United States Armed Forces, responsible for its aerial warfare component. As of 2024, there are a little over 426,000 uniformed personnel, with most serving as full time professional airmen and the rest serving part time in the U.S. Air Force Reserves or the Air National Guard. It can offer an exciting career with a host of different options, but is it right for you?

Qualifying and Joining

First you will need to speak to an Air Force recruiter. They will inform you about a career and life in the Air Force as well as guide you through the process of joining. You will be working closely with them. Our article "How to Talk to A Recruiter" earlier in this issue will help with some pointers on how to make this relationship work smoothly.

Specialties and Occupations

In the Air Force there are a multitude of different roles that work together to create an effective fighting force. Some will directly involve fighting and flying. There are many different pilot roles like fighter pilots, helicopter pilots, cargo plane pilots and many others. Also there are support roles such as operational research analysts, cyberspace operations, and aircraft maintenance.

Also in the Air Force there is the Active Duty Component, the Reserves and also the National Guard. While serving as active duty is a full time job, the Reserves and National Guard will serve part time, though they can be called up to serve full time depending on the situation.



Compensation and Benefits

As a private fresh out of Basic Training, you will make \$24,204. This is relatively low but goes up as you progress through the ranks and serve more years. For instance a Staff Sergeant with 8 years of more experience will make more than double this annually. While military pay is lower than what people can make in the private sector, the military will also pay for a significant portion of your housing (known as a Basic Housing Allowance) and pay for your medical care through TRICARE.

Once you leave the service, there are many benefits to being a veteran such as educational benefits, getting the GI Bill to pay for your college, tuition assistance, retirement pay and helping you buy a home.

Learn From A Veteran

Captain Ryan Lamo is an Air Force officer and graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy in 2014. He has served as a pilot and now works at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs.

Pathways: What would you do to maximize your time in getting a head start in your field?

Captain Lamo: I'll go with two parts for this, first is military in general second will be as a pilot.

For the military in general just study and look for every way to improve yourself. Learn as much as you can about everything. Read leadership books. Study your butt off in school. Get in shape. Play sports. Figure out how to take care of finances. Find something you're weak at, physically or mentally, and improve at it. The more work you put into your life early, the more prepared you'll be for the random issues/problems you'll be in charge of in the military.

In terms of being a pilot. Try to get your PPL, get in an airplane and figure out if you like it. It will make pilot training a lot easier if you've been in an airplane before. Hang around old retired pilots/reach out to different pilot networks, there's tons on every social media platform. Ask them questions about planes they've flown and the lifestyle that goes with it. It'll help guide your decisions in pilot training.

Pathways: How can a high schooler prepare for your field?

Captain Lamo: If you want to be a pilot, you're going to have to be a professional student for the rest of your life. There's never a point that you've learned everything. So get used to studying and learning new topics.

Pathways: What was the student life at your school? Did it aid your future career or inhibit it?

Captain Lamo: USAFA and other military academies are different from any private/public university. You're in the military and a full time student. So while we don't have to work a part time job to pay the bills. After my freshman year I didn't have a day that was shorter than 18 hours. You take on leadership roles within your student body as well as get schooling done. This could be a whole book answer so I'll try to keep it short. The big thing it aids you in is being immersed in the military lifestyle right away. You graduate with a good understanding of the system you are joining. Yeah there's lots to learn but the culture shock of being in the military is already over so the learning curve is shorter than a guy/gal coming in off the street.

Pathways: Are there any mistakes you can think of that a new person in your field/at your school can avoid?



Captain Lamo: Figure out what career you want and then talk to advisors/mentors to figure out what degree/programs you can do to get you to that career. There's always someone out there who's done it or knows someone who has. Utilize those people for their knowledge to help get you where you want to go. It'll make the journey easier and you can learn from others' experiences.

Pathways: What do you see as the future of your field?

Captain Lamo: I think pilots will be around for quite a while physically in planes. In the future I'm sure unmanned will start to be a bigger player, but that doesn't mean there won't be pilots. In the near future, like 10-20 years, I think we'll see advances in the types of aircraft that can go further/faster and more economical and there will be more automation (more the airplane can do without requiring pilot intervention). But I don't think we'll be pilot-less for quite some time.

Pathways: What is your average day like as an Air Force officer?

Captain Lamo: Haha, to be honest, I don't have a normal day. My day usually starts around 4 am. I get a workout in and head to work. On days I'm in the office, I usually work from 7:30-5. I have a few jobs so each day my focus is a little different. Sometimes I'm writing performance reports for the guys and gals I supervise. Other days I'm creating training plans for pilots. And other days I'm running meetings or giving briefings to younger pilots. On days that I fly, I usually show up early in the morning and get paperwork ready to go fly the mission. It could be a short flight getting training done or it could be a long flight going anywhere in the world.





I'm usually gone a few weeks a month on trips all over. Flying usually keeps you on the road a lot. So there really isn't what I'd call a normal day.

Pathways: How long does it take to get established in your field?

Captain Lamo: After a degree, pilot training takes about 1.5–2 years. After that you have to follow on training. Typically, one can be a fully qualified co-pilot in about 2.5 years. To actually be established and competent it'll take another couple years. Usually around the 5 years mark is when you can consider yourself an accomplished/competent pilot.

Pathways: What opportunities do you see for individuals working in your field, or for your field of study writ large to better our society?

Captain Lamo: The Air Force has tons of opportunities. You just have to ask the right questions, but there's really a program out there for pretty much anything. It doesn't mean you'll get to do it, but if the timing is right and you make your requests known, you can likely branch out into all kinds of different fields.

In general, being an officer in the military means you're going to have opportunities both in and out of the military. You've got leadership experience and usually a high degree of skill in a technical field. So there are lots of opportunities inside and out of the military.

Pathways: What is one piece of advice you would give to your younger self, while examining your future

Captain Lamo: Figure out what your long term goals are and what you want to do and pursue them. Don't let someone else's opinion of what is a cool job/degree/career make your decision. And ask questions of everyone who has experience so you can figure out what the life is really like and if it will lead you to your goals.





What's It Like to Serve in the U.S. Coast Guard?

The U.S. Coast Guard is one of the maritime branches of the United States Armed Forces, responsible for multiple missions ranging from search & rescue, maritime security and law enforcement. As of 2024, there are a little over 47,000 Coast Guard personnel, with most serving as full time and the rest serving part time in the Reserves. It can offer an exciting career with a host of different options, but is it right for you?

Qualifying and Joining

First you will need to speak to a Coast Guard recruiter. They will inform you about a career and life in the Coast Guard as well as guide you through the process of joining. You will be working closely with them. Our article “How to Talk to A Recruiter” earlier in this issue will help with some pointers on how to make this relationship work smoothly.

Next you will pass an aptitude test known as the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery or ASVAB. This will help you qualify for a certain job. There is a degree of choice but also the Coast Guard will assign you depending on how you score as well as the Coast Guard's need. Studying for this is highly recommended as the higher you score, the more you can qualify for. Lastly you will sign a contract and prepare for Basic Training.



U.S. Coast Guard Basic Training lasts 8 weeks and is a grueling process of elimination. You will be tested and trained on how to be a Guardsman. From there you will go to later training for the specific job or specialty you qualified for.

Specialties and Occupations

In the Coast there are a multitude of different roles, or ratings, that work together to create an effective force. The Coast Guard is unique in that it is a combination of several different maritime security and safety roles. Originally the Coast Guard was the Revenue Marine, which focused on counter smuggling and counter piracy operations along the U.S. coastline. In 1915 the Life Saving Service was brought under the purview of a new service which was called the Coast Guard. As a result it is unique among the Armed Forces for handling a traditional military role, a civilian safety role and a law enforcement role. In the Coast Guard you can get a job on an ice breaking ship in the Arctic, as a safety diver or as a law enforcement tactical officer, among many others.

Also in the Coast Guard there is the Active Duty Component and the Reserves. While serving as active duty is a full time job, the Reserves serve part time, though they can be called up to serve full time depending on the situation.

Compensation and Benefits

As a Seaman Recruit fresh out of Basic Training, you will make \$21,996. This is relatively low but goes up as you progress through the ranks and serve more years. For instance a Petty Officer First Class with 8 years of more experience will make more than double this annually. While military pay is lower than what people can make in the private sector, the military will also pay for a significant portion of your housing (known as a Basic Housing Allowance) and pay for your medical care through TRICARE.

Once you leave the service, there are many benefits to being a veteran such as educational benefits, getting the GI Bill to pay for your college, tuition assistance, retirement pay and helping you buy a home.

Learn From A Veteran

LT Peter Ludlam is an officer and attorney in the U.S. Coast Guard. He graduated from University of California, Irvine School of Law in 2017 and is licensed to practice law in California and in all military courts. Prior to commissioning in the Coast Guard, LT Ludlam worked for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, The National Federation of Federal Employees, and Biola University.

Pathways: What motivated you to serve in the military and in the Coast Guard specifically?

LT Ludlam: My first motivation for wanting to serve in the military was simply that the people who I respected had served. I completed two internships with the Coast Guard while I was in school and those experiences confirmed for me that I wanted to be a part of this organization. Why Coast Guard over another branch? There are more similarities between branches than there are differences, but I wouldn't have been happy in the Marines, Army, Navy, or Air Force. I have close friends in other branches that wouldn't be happy in the Coast Guard. The question I would ask someone who



was trying to decide between different branches of the military is “What mission are you most excited about?”

Pathways: Do you feel like there was an opportunity cost in the Coast Guard as opposed to another path?

LT Ludlam: I missed out on family birthday parties, friends’ weddings, and holidays back home. There are good days and bad days in the military, just like with any other job, except that the bad days can get really, really bad. (I’ll talk about the good days later.) The United States has an entire federal agency called the

Department of Veterans Affairs that’s purposed with taking care of military members who’ve had really bad days. We have Memorial Day, a holiday that celebrates service members who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. There’s a famous saying by a Korean War veteran about his time in the service: “All gave some, some gave all.” I think that’s correct. Everyone who signs the paperwork in the recruiter’s office is going to give something up. Everyone who signs the paperwork is asking their friends, parents, spouses, and children to give something up. There’s something very sobering

about realizing that people your age have died wearing the uniform you are now wearing. Sure, chances are that you won’t make that sacrifice, but you will absolutely make other sacrifices during your time here.

Pathways: What would you say were the biggest benefits to your time in the service?

LT Ludlam: There are entire books written about this question, but I’ll try and give you my top three.

1. On a professional level, my military experience has accelerated my career growth significantly. The military invests a lot of time and resources into training its members, and employers know it. If you want to be a helicopter pilot, the Coast Guard’s helicopter pilot training is the best in the world. If you want to learn a foreign language, the Defense Language Institute is easily the best foreign language school in the world. You could attend a law enforcement training course with the U.S. Secret Service, or attend a culinary school that teaches you how to plate dishes during a hurricane. If you have the motivation to be excellent in your field, the military will reward that.

2. The military pays very well. An E-4 with 4 years of experience makes about \$70,000 a year, which is substantially more than most undergraduates make after four years of school. You also get free healthcare, four years of college/grad school paid for (the GI Bill can be worth upwards of \$250k if you use it well), 30 days of vacation a year, etc. etc. When the military is



especially short on people, some career fields will also offer substantial signing bonuses. At the time of writing, Coast Guard is paying \$65,000 as a bonus for agreeing to serve as an Electronics Technician for four years after completing boot camp. It is not unrealistic to be making \$100k a year by age 30 with no college degree.

3. I get to be proud of the work I do. I have the privilege of working with smart, motivated, committed people who are working together to achieve the Coast Guard's mission. Sure, you get some days where

nothing goes right and everything falls apart around you, but the next day you and your team pick up from where you left off and do better next time.

Pathways: What would you do to maximize your time in getting a head start in the military?

LT Ludlam: If you're thinking about enlisting when you graduate, this is the number one thing I would focus on:

Learn to be the kind of person you'd want to work with. If you have a chip on your shoulder, either get rid of it

fast or your drill instructor will help you! Basic training is 10x times harder if you're carrying around a bad attitude. Kindness, empathy and integrity are learned skills, and you can start practicing those skills right now. Some of the people in your basic training class will not want to be there. Those people will get "special attention" from instructors (Hint: this is not the special attention that you want). The people who continue to fight the program will likely be dis-enrolled. The military does not reward cruelty, bullying others, or dishonesty. If you learn how to control yourself now, it will be much easier to control yourself when you're tired and doing pushups in the mud at 0600. Even after you graduate from Cape May, you will continue to be evaluated by others throughout your military career. If I'm your supervisor and you give me 100% each day with a positive attitude, I will give you my 100% effort in getting you promoted.

After that, my advice would be to build up your physical fitness. You don't need to run marathons, but to graduate from basic training you need to be able to push through some physical fitness tests. Even if you ultimately don't decide to enlist in the military, you won't regret being able to run two miles.

Pathways: How can a high schooler prepare for being a Guardsman?

LT Ludlam: After personal development and physical fitness (discussed above), consider participating in a JROTC program at your high school if it's available. As of the time of writing, if you complete three years of

JROTC in high school, the Navy and Air Force will start you at the E-3 pay grade when you enlist, and the Army and Marines will start you at E-2. The Coast Guard has a very limited JROTC program that extends to only a few schools. It is my belief that the real value of the JROTC program is the connections and friendships you will make with like-minded and goal-oriented people.

Also consider getting involved in a team sport. One pitfall I see junior Coast Guard members fall into frequently is not working as a team, which is completely understandable as many of them have never been on a team before. In high school, your grades are a result of the individual time and effort you place in your studies. In the Coast Guard, your “grades” (we call these Enlisted Evaluation Reports) are all about how well you work as team member.

Pathways: What was the work life in the service? Did serving in the military aid your future career or inhibit it?

LT Ludlam: Work-life is highly variable depending on what job you do. If you are serving on a Coast Guard cutter or a Navy ship, you will effectively be working 24 hours a day for months at a time. There will be times you will not have access to your cell phone or the internet, and even your “off duty” hours will be spent on a ship with the crew, ready to respond to an emergency. Conversely, if you work in human resources at a shore unit, your job may be predictably 0800-1600 with an hour lunch break and liberty every weekend. As a lawyer, my work hours are usually 0800-1600 with the occasional weekend work



if I have a trial coming up.

Pathways: Are there any mistakes you can think of that a new person in the Coast Guard can avoid?

LT Ludlam: I have made many mistakes during my time in the Coast Guard. It’s okay to fail sometimes, learn from the experience and do better next time.

However, there are three serious failures in judgment that, if you make them, will permanently end your military career and likely result in punishment ranging from demotion to prison time.

1. The Coast Guard has a zero tolerance policy for drug abuse. Yes, that includes marijuana. Yes, the military will take random urine samples throughout your career—I have stood in line to give a urine sample along with two-star admirals and I have seen high-ranking officers’ careers end abruptly over a “hot” test. Our job is to catch people bringing drugs into the country, so abusing drugs is incompatible with service in the Coast Guard.

2. The Coast Guard also has a zero tolerance policy for sexual assault and domestic violence.

3. Alcohol abuse has historically been a significant problem for the military; although a single DUI will not officially end your Coast Guard career, it is very difficult to promote with an alcohol incident in your record.

Pathways: What was your average day like as a Guardsman?

LT Ludlam: One of the best parts of serving in the Coast Guard is that there are very few average days. My first job in the Coast Guard was as agency counsel for civil litigation. My cases ranged from suing multinational companies that spilled oil in U.S. waters, to defending Coast Guard members who got in car accidents while on duty. My second job was in a Special Victims unit where I helped victims of some of the worst crimes imaginable get justice against their abusers and rebuild their lives. In my third job, I am a legal advisor to a major Coast Guard command where I assist senior leaders with understanding their legal responsibilities. Every day brings something new through my door.

Pathways: How long does it take to get established in a job?

LT Ludlam: In the past, it took 3-4 years for an enlisted member to get to where they had a permanent job area. The Coast Guard and Navy use the term “rate” to describe a job area; for example, a CS3 would be a rate held by an E-4 Culinary Specialist, or a DC1 would be a rate held by an E-6

Damage Controlman. However, because there is a severe shortage of enlisted personnel in the Coast Guard, it is now much faster to get established in a permanent job area. There are currently several permanent jobs that allow a member to go straight from basic training to a specialized training course. I expect that in the near future, Coast Guard members will have even more flexibility to test out permanent jobs before committing to them. Officers in the Coast Guard do not have an MOS or rate—the Coast Guard is unique in that it allows all officers to compete for any job they are qualified for.

Pathways: What is one piece of advice you would give to your younger self, while examining your future?

LT Ludlam: I commissioned as an officer in the Coast Guard at the age of 27. I didn’t enlist at the age of 18, and looking back I’m glad I didn’t because I wouldn’t have been a good fit then. Other people are a great fit for the Coast Guard at age 18, and not a good fit at age 24. Don’t compare yourself to others, we all have a unique journey through life, and our interests and goals are always changing. If you feel like you’re ready to make the jump and enlist, go for it! If not, keep it in mind for the future. Finally, you’re going to make mistakes sometimes. When other people mess up and make your job tougher, stand with them. They’ll stand with you when it’s your turn to drop the ball.



What's It Like to Serve in the U.S. Space Force?

The U.S. Space Force is the newest branch of the United States Armed Forces, responsible for its space warfare component. As of 2024, there are a little over 8,000 uniformed personnel. It can offer an exciting career with a host of different options, but is it right for you?

Qualifying and Joining

First you will need to speak to an Air Force recruiter, as they also handle Space Force recruiting. They will inform you about a career and life in the Space Force as well as guide you through the process of joining. You will be working closely with them. Our article "How to Talk to A Recruiter" earlier in this issue will help with some pointers on how to make this relationship work smoothly.

Next you will pass an aptitude test known as the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery or ASVAB. This will help you qualify for a certain job. There is a degree of choice but also the Space Force will assign you depending on how you score as well as the Force's need. Studying for



this is highly recommended as the higher you score, the more you can qualify for. Lastly you will sign a contract and prepare for Basic Training.

U.S. Space Force Basic Military Training lasts approximately 8 weeks and is a grueling process of elimination. You will be tested and trained. From there you will go to later technical training for the specialty you qualified for.

Specialties and Occupations

In the Space Force there are a multitude of different roles that work together to create an effective fighting force. The Space Force isn't just unique as the newest branch or the smallest but as the force responsible for the United States' ability to freely operate in space, it is mostly focused on technical and scientific warfare as opposed to directly fighting. As such there is an extremely heavy STEM emphasis in its career options such as a geospatial

intelligence analyst, computer systems engineer or even astronaut

The Space Force is also unique in that it is entirely made up of full time, active duty personnel.

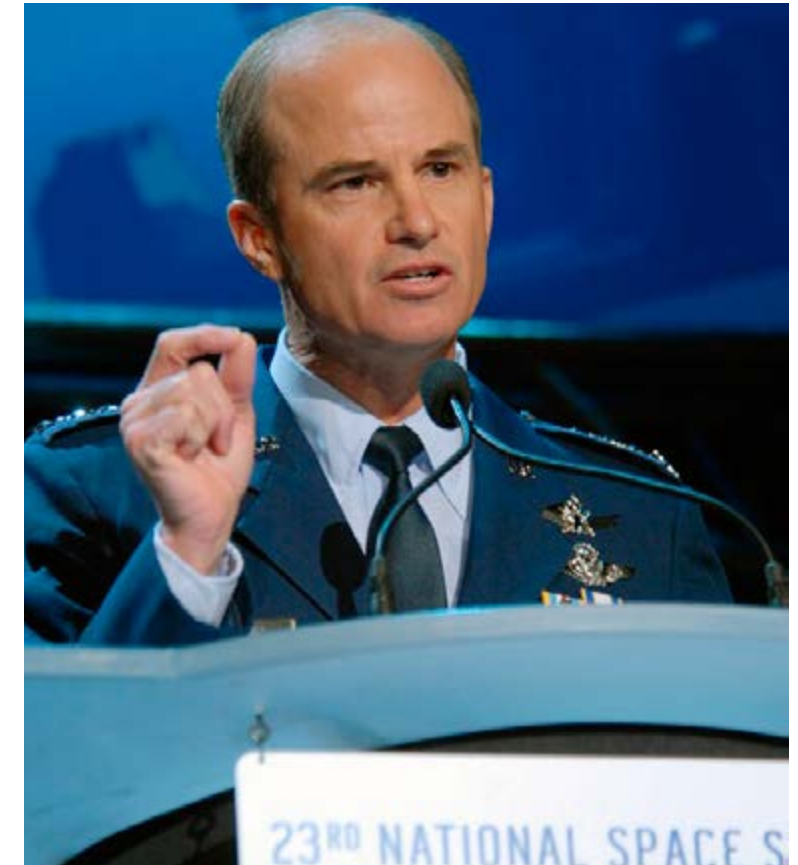
Compensation and Benefits

As a private fresh out of Basic Training, you will make just over \$24,000. This is relatively low but goes up as you progress through the ranks and serve more years. For instance a Staff Sergeant with 8 years of more experience will make more than double this annually. While military pay is lower than what people can make in the private sector, the military will also pay for a significant portion of your housing (known as a Basic Housing Allowance)

and pay for your medical care through TRICARE.

Once you leave the service, there are many benefits to being a veteran such as educational benefits, getting the GI Bill to pay for your college, tuition assistance, retirement pay and helping you buy a home.

Space is not only the new frontier for scientific exploration, or even private space travel. As warfare becomes increasingly technologically advanced, space will continue to be a potential warfare domain though mainly through cyberspace operations. Joining the Space Force can be an impressive addition to your resume as well as an exciting way to serve in the newest branch at the very start.





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