

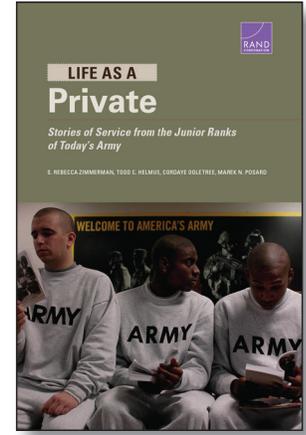


# Life as a Private

## Stories of Service from the Junior Ranks of Today's Army

S. Rebecca Zimmerman, Todd C. Helmus, Cordaye Ogletree, Marek N. Posard

[www.rand.org/t/RR2749](http://www.rand.org/t/RR2749)



There is much more to Army service than the outlines with which most Americans are familiar. A separate RAND Arroyo Center report details the service experiences of 81 junior enlisted soldiers; the objective of this report is to provide deeper insight into the junior enlisted experience in a way that is accessible to policymakers, Army leaders, recruiters, and potential recruits. This volume tells the stories of six soldiers in their own words.



### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are some sample attitudes, experiences, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivators of soldiers assigned to their first unit?
- What insights can Army leadership draw from these true stories about how to attract and retain the best talent?



### KEY FINDINGS

Soldiers express common themes regarding leadership

- The soldiers interviewed emphasized that they can tell which leaders really care about them, and that this is a key component of what makes a good leader.
- For the soldiers in this report, the best leaders are those who lead from the front and who respect their soldiers' time and contributions.

Upon enlistment, the soldiers interviewed had little in common besides youth

- The majority of privates enlisting in the Army do so at a young age, and this is reflected in the group of soldiers interviewed here.
- The soldiers in these interviews had a varied range of experience with the military before deciding to enlist.

*continued on back*

Soldiers discover that Army life is more than boot camp, and it fosters strong relationships

- It was not uncommon for soldiers, upon arrival at their new base and job, to remark that military life was not as strict as they anticipated; many soldiers entered the Army thinking that it would be a mere continuation of boot camp.
- Virtually all six participants reported strong relationships with their fellow unit members.

Most of the soldiers in this report expressed satisfaction with their social lives in the Army

- Soldiers find that the Army provides a ready-made social circle.
- The presence of a dependent appears to make a big difference between excellent financial health and some financial difficulty for the soldiers in this report.

The Army is a transformative institution, and soldiers are changed by their military experience



## RECOMMENDATIONS

---

- For those who write policy for the Army, it is important to understand what soldiers care about and what frustrates them.
- For Army recruiters, this volume shows what recent recruits wish they had known about the Army beforehand and how a good recruiter can help to prepare a soldier for his or her career.

