

## Retention remains high military-wide, including in combat Zone

**DONNA MILES**

*American Forces Press Service*

WASHINGTON – Regardless of what’s happening in terms of recruitment, Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines already serving are reenlisting at rates that surpass all expectations, according to defense officials.

Defense Department statistics for June, released Tuesday, showed the Army missed its active-duty recruiting goal for the second consecutive month. Yet retention remained high across the board, 101 percent of goal for the active Army, 119 percent for the Army Reserve, and 107 percent for the Army National Guard, Maj. Anne Edgecomb, an Army spokeswoman, told American Forces Press Service.

“Recruiting is important, but so is retention,” Bryan Whitman, deputy assistant secretary for public affairs, told Pentagon reporters Wednesday.

He said high retention rates help offset shortfalls on the recruiting side, particularly in light of the fact that the Army is ahead of its year-to-date recruiting goals. “Retention, to some degree, has been a mitigating factor because we have had very good retention rates and they have exceeded retention goals,” Whitman said.

Of particular interest, he said, are high retention rates among troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Last week, for example, 588 deployed soldiers reenlisted during a Fourth of July ceremony at Baghdad’s Al Faw Palace. Army Gen. David H. Petraeus, commander of Multinational Force Iraq, administered the oath of reenlistment.

These servicemembers recognize the challenges of military service, particularly in a combat zone, Petraeus noted during the Independence Day reenlistment ceremony.

Troops choose to reenlist for a wide range of reasons, said Army Sgt. 1st Class Brian Helgren, career counselor for 15th Sustainment Brigade at Camp Taji. Some stay for personal reasons or to continue a family tradition.

Some are enticed by retention bonuses, although Petraeus noted during the Independence Day reenlistment ceremony that money alone isn’t the reason.

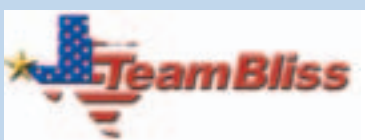
“No bonus, no matter the size, can adequately compensate you for the contribution each of you has made and continues to make as a custodian of our nation’s defenses,” he told the group. “Nor can any amount of money compensate you adequately for the sacrifices you make serving here in Iraq or the burdens your loved ones face at home in your absence. And we certainly cannot put a price on the freedoms you defend or those we are trying to help the Iraqis establish and safeguard here in the land of the two rivers.”

Helgren said some troops choose to reenlist because they can’t imagine doing anything else.

“(The) bottom line is that Soldiers love just serving their country and being in the Army, therefore making the Army a career,” he said.

### Correction

In the “USASMA welcomes Class 58 international military students” article in a previous issue of *The Monitor*, the article incorrectly listed Albania and South Africa as being represented for the first time by Class 58’s International Military students. Both Albania and South Africa have been represented in previous Sergeants Major Course classes. The article should have read that Bolivia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and Papua-New Guinea are represented for the first time, in Class 58.



## Casey

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component also made the list.

Casey said the current plan is to increase the Army’s strength to 540,000 through 2012, something many think ought to happen sooner than that.

“We can do it faster,” Casey said. “It’s not easy. We’ve missed our recruiting goals for the second month in a row and I think there’s a lot of uncertainty out there about the direction Congress is going to go with the next administration, but we’re looking about getting that done.”

“The other thing that came out of this, is we are asking a quantum difference more of our Soldiers and their families than we ever have ... and even though we’ve come light years, but we have to elevate our game.” Some of the additional support for Soldiers and families comes with the funding of Family Readiness Group Support Assistants at the battalion level and the efforts to keep family programs from falling victim to budget cuts and standardize programs across installations.

One question Casey said will become a national debate is whether or not the strength increase to 540,000 will be enough to help take care of some of the Soldier and family issues.

“We know we need to get bigger,” he said. “I’m going to force that debate inside the Pentagon and with the administration, because what I don’t want to do is go forward without a strong commitment to fund and maintain our current quality. I came into hollow in the early 70s and I’m not going out hollow. That is we have



MAJ. DEANNA BAGUE

**Army Chief of Staff Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., congratulates Chief Warrant Officer Charles Talley Jr., food advisor for Stafford Consolidated Dining Facility, 11th Air Defense Artillery Brigade, for managing the installation’s culinary team who won the Installation of the Year title at the 32nd Annual U.S. Culinary Arts Competition. Casey presented Talley and other Fort Bliss military and civilian personnel with coins for earning top awards for their performance.**

going on right now that is pretty important. I think we need to be candid with each other that unless there is some quick accommodation in Iraq, we’re going to remain at about the same level of deployment ... over the next three or four years.”

Casey said his plan of seven initiatives is designed to address everything from accomplishing Army growth and enhancing support to building strategic communication capabilities that will better get the word out about the “98 percent of things we’re doing absolutely magnificently.” And the list of eight things he considers important includes conti-

nuity, sustaining a quality Army, taking care of Soldiers, civilians and families and familiar words like teamwork, leadership and values.

“Teamwork is what’s sustaining us,” Casey said. “And we are what we are today because we are a values-based organization. We have existed as an Army since 1775 to win the nation’s wars – and that’s the business we’re still in. There’s a level of commitment I see in the young men and women I talk to as I go around who understand that’s what this is about and we will continue to do that.”

## DOD pursues aggressive MRAP fielding strategy

**DONNA MILES**

*American Forces Press Service*

WASHINGTON – The Defense Department is taking unprecedented steps to get Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles to deployed troops as quickly as possible – from fast-tracking the acquisition process to airlifting models as they roll off the assembly line.

Marine Corps Systems Command flew a shipment of MRAPs to the theater June 29 to cut the normal transit time, Bryan Whitman, deputy assistant secretary of defense for public affairs, told Pentagon reporters July 2. Marine Corps officials would not divulge details about how many vehicles were shipped, or specifically where they were destined to go, citing security concerns.

The delivery occurred just days after the Defense Department’s Joint Requirements Oversight Council endorsed procuring as many MRAPs as industry can provide in fiscal 2008. The top-level panel, which validates military requirements, recommended evaluating the situation in Iraq periodically and adjusting the acquisition plan based on the need.

The JROC recommendation tracks with Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates’ efforts to expedite MRAP fielding. Impressed by the Marine Corps’ success in reducing casualties due to roadside bombs and other explosives, Gates declared the MRAP acquisition effort a top priority and formed a task force to move it forward.

“What is clear is that the department is embarking on an aggressive acquisition strategy to put as many of these armored vehicles into the field as fast as possible,” Whitman said.

Defense Department and military services are reaching out to industry to “incentivize” companies to boost production while reducing the production timetable, Whitman said.

Force Protection Industries, which delivered the MRAPs airlifted June 29, reported its factory in Charleston, S.C., is hiring dozens of new employees every week to churn out the vehicles “as fast as humanly possible.”

Another MRAP manufacturer, General Dynamics Land Systems announced last week it had delivered its first MRAPs to the Marine Corps less than 120 days after getting its first production order.

“The companies that have been awarded the contracts

are ramping up their production capabilities,” Gates told reporters during a June 29 news conference. “I am pressing them very hard to see where they can cut the time scale as well as increase their production.”

The goal, Whitman said, is to bridge the gap in the level of protection offered by up-armored Humvees and more heavily armored vehicles such as M2 Bradley fighting vehicles and M1 Abrams tanks. MRAPs, with their raised, V-shaped underbellies, deflect the force of improvised explosive devices and other blasts from below.

Whitman emphasized MRAPs aren’t likely to replace all Humvees.

“Typically, what a commander will do is pick the tools that are best for the mission he is about to go out and do,” Whitman said. “There are times when a particular vehicle makes sense for a particular type of mission, but not necessarily for another.”

Commanders will assess, among other factors, whether their troops were mounted or dismounted and how much mobility and protection they needed during a particular operation, he said.

Ultimately, Whitman said there is no “one solution fits all” answer to protecting troops from roadside bombs and other explosives. “You could go all the way up on the high end of armored protection, but everybody in body armor and M1 tanks, but it could be very constrictive in your ability to accomplish your mission,” he said.

Even as MRAPs are hurried to the theater, private industry is busy working on improving on the models that will replace them.

Marine Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, praised these efforts during the June 29 news conference.

“One of the main reasons that we have the world’s best military is because we have the world’s best industry to back it up,” he said. “We have got incredible patriots in our defense industries who are working very hard side-by-side with us to figure out the solution to these problems.”

That technological know-how and patriotism are coming together to produce the best MRAP vehicles possible, Pace told reporters.

“So as the MRAP comes on line ... people in our industry are out looking for the thing that is going to replace the MRAP, because it’s an evolutionary process,” he said.